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DENON HEOS AVR

Home cinema audio goes wireless, p40

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Steljes NS6 active speakers
LG 55in Dolby Vision TV

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MANGA MADNESS

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ATMOS
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HEARD BUT NOT SEEN...
INVISIBLE CINEMA FROM DALI'S PHANTOM SPEAKERS



FILM & TV

- POWER RANGERS
- AMERICAN GODS
- FREE FIRE ■ THE FATE OF THE FURIOUS [4K]
- DREDD [4K]

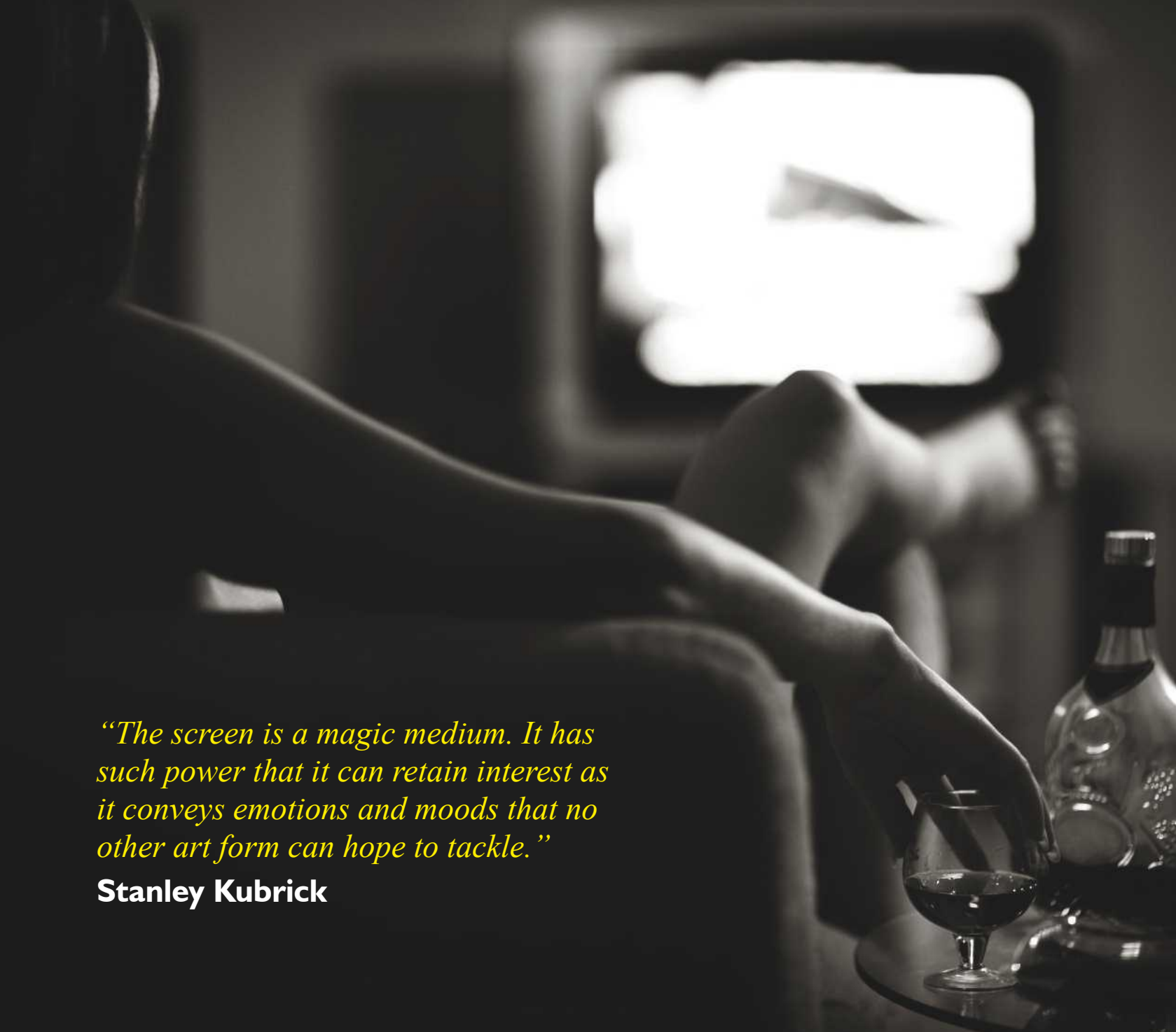
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→ CES ASIA: BEST IN SHOW → OPINION → GEORGE A. ROMERO → BBC 4K PLANS

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ISSUE 276 SEPTEMBER 2017 £4.99
AUS - \$13.50 NZ - \$14.99 CAN - \$17.00



09



"The screen is a magic medium. It has such power that it can retain interest as it conveys emotions and moods that no other art form can hope to tackle."

Stanley Kubrick

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From outside the UK: +44 (0) 1689 869 840
Distributed in the UK by Marketforce UK Ltd

BACKGROUND WALL IMAGES:
©SHUTTERSTOCK.COM
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Home Cinema Choice, ISSN 1359-6276, is published monthly with an additional issue in May by AVTech Media Ltd, a division of MYTIME MEDIA Ltd, Suite 25, Eden House, Enterprise Way, Edenbridge, Kent, TN8 6HF, UK. The US annual subscription price is £66GBP (equivalent to approximately \$98USD). Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named Air Business Ltd, c/o Worldnet Shipping Inc., 156-15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Jamaica NY 11431. US Postmaster: Send address changes to Home Cinema Choice, Worldnet Shipping Inc., 156-15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA. Subscription records are maintained at CDS GLOBAL Ltd, Tower House, Sovereign Park, Market Harborough, Leicestershire, LE16 9EF. Air Business Ltd is acting as our mailing agent.



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Seeking out the top tech at CES Asia, p20

Welcome

Good news for those with futureproof AV systems this month, with the BBC confirming that any future 4K content will also use HDR and wide colour technologies (not to mention 5.1 or possibly greater surround sound). As the Beeb's Andy Quested asks (p9), what's the point in making Ultra HD programming in REC.709?

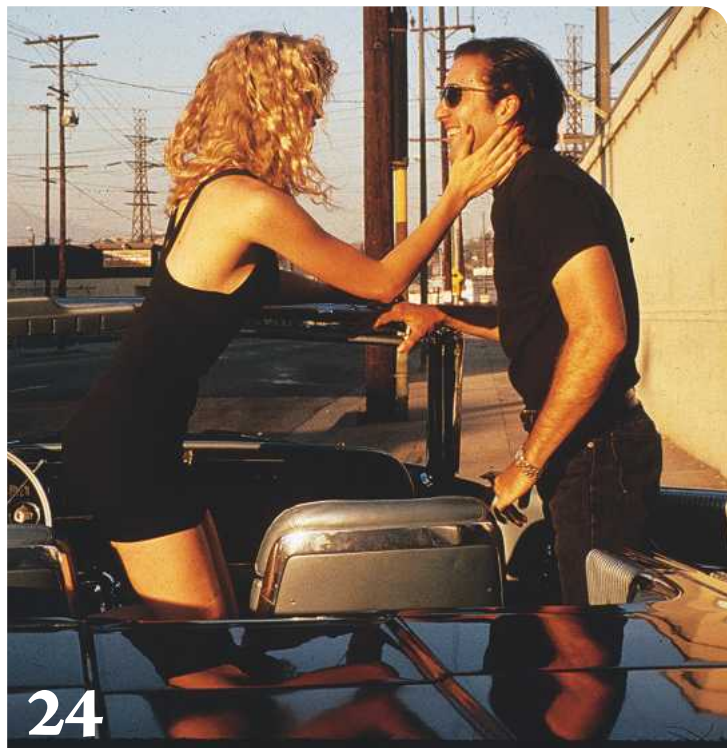


Actually, though, I think there is a point. The new football season is kicking off about now, and will mark the third year that BT (via its pay-per-view package) has aired football games in 4K. Sky is unleashing its second season, combined with a Summer of Ultra HD cricket coverage. Neither broadcaster has yet embraced HDR, but it's not the sort of thing that necessarily occurs to you when gawping at crystal-clear sports. That's not to say I won't be pleased when standards develop, but I'm still thankful these two have led the 4K charge in the UK. Even if it means I end up watching far too much footy...

Mark Craven
Editor



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Jon Thompson:
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Steve May:
HCC's former Editor-in-Chief is one of the UK's most respected AV journo



Martin Pipe:
Technical expert Martin is renowned throughout the home cinema industry



Richard Stevenson:
Industry veteran and former Editor of UK CE trade journal ERT



Danny Phillips:
A former editor of *What Video* magazine, now a certified home cinema audio buff

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YAMAHA

Wireless Streaming Adapter

WXAD-10



Add sound anywhere

Simple connection

Connect to any audio device

Equipped with RCA and stereo mini output terminals, the WXAD-10 can be connected to a wide range of audio products — whatever components you currently have. Use it with a shelf stereo system, Hi-Fi audio equipment, home theatre system, or even a soundbar. The possibilities are endless.

Wide selection of streaming services

Spotify, Tidal, Deezer and more

You can enjoy everything. The WXAD-10 is compatible with a large variety of popular streaming services, including the widespread Spotify, the up-and-coming Tidal and Deezer services, as well as Napster, Qobuz, Juke and others – letting you enjoy all your favourite artists, and music content from all over the world.



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email jake.stevenson@music.yamaha.com for details

BULLETIN

→ **NEWS HIGHLIGHTS** C SEED Bonkers 262in ultra-wide 4K LED TV unveiled BBC HDR and wide colour to go hand-in-hand with Ultra HD LOEWE OLED TV with '60s style SONY UBP-X1000ES deck targets automated setups **NEWS X10** The hottest news stories in bite-sized chunks **ALIEN: COVENANT** Prepare to be scared witless on 4K Blu-ray... & MORE!

Laser for your discs

Dell S718QL → www.dell.co.uk

Dell's S718QL needs little room to create a bigscreen experience, using an ultra-short-throw lens and laser light source to deliver 100in images from a projector-to-wall distance of just 12cm. While the business-leaning corp flags up the PJ's 'presentation' skills, the unit's HDR support and HDCP 2.2-enabled HDMI input make it ripe for partnering with a UHD BD deck, especially in a regular living room – brightness is rated at a searing 5,000 Lumens.



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GUNS 'N' POSES

1970s-set crime thriller *Free Fire* pulls the trigger on BD, p95

Flatscreen heavyweight

C Seed 262 → www.cseed.tv/indoor-tv

Billed as 'the world's largest 4K widescreen TV' – and weighing 800kg – the 262 from luxury Austrian brand C Seed measures a mammoth 262in diagonally across its CinemaScope-ratio LED-lit panel. Bonus features for its mega-rich buyers (pricing is as yet unspecified, but it won't be cheap...) include an integrated 4K media server, 10-strong speaker array and a motorised fabric cover to hide the TV when it's not in use. We'll take one for the downstairs toilet, thanks...

Sony targets custom installers



Sony has now launched its 4K Blu-ray deck aimed exclusively at the custom installation market in the UK.

Part of the brand's ES range, the UBP-X1000ES offers the AV bell and whistles we've come to expect from a UHD Blu-ray player and adds 'virtually every connectivity option required for complex custom installations' – including IP control over CAT 5 cable or Wi-Fi, RS232 and IR inputs – plus a web interface supporting the Iijii remote maintenance solution. <http://pro.sony.eu>

One more set of hi-res cans



Audio manufacturer 1MORE has taken the wraps off its latest headphones. Tuned by Grammy Award-winning sound engineer Luca Bignardi, the H1707 Triple Drive Over-Ear Headphones employ 'aerospace-grade'

ceramic driver technology and Kevlar-wrapped cabling for what the company promises is a hi-res listening experience with a frequency response of 20Hz to 40kHz. The black-and-gold styled H1707s are available now from the 1MORE website, priced around £200. <http://uk.1more.com>

BBC lays down 4K law

Technology bigwig says wide colour and HDR must go hand-in-hand

The BBC says its future UHD programming will be shot in High Dynamic Range and wide colour. In a swipe at both Sky and BT TV, which currently broadcast 4K with conventional REC.709 colour, BBC HD & UHD Head of Technology Andy Quested insists that the two must be inseparable. 'We're not going to invest in programmes that are REC.709,' he says. 'What's the point?'

Speaking at an industry conference organised by satellite operator SES, Quested went on to say that surround sound 'or better' would also be standard for all new commissions. 'We're mandating surround sound as the minimum requirement for Ultra HD programmes, hopefully moving to object-based, or Dolby Atmos later,' he says. 'This has got to happen.'

Quested also suggests that adopting advances in broadcast technology is key to ensuring that TV archives keep their value.

He cites the original *Planet Earth* series, the first show by the BBC Natural History Unit to be shot in HD, as evidence. 'It continues to sell ten years on. It's vital that *Planet Earth II* does the same, which is why it was made in UHD with HDR.'



Andy Quested: 'Compatibility with non-HDR televisions is not optional. All BBC commissions will be HLG...'

So what HDR flavour does the corporation favour? 'Compatibility with non-HDR TVs is not optional,' he told *HCC*. 'All BBC commissions will be HLG (Hybrid Log-Gamma) – unless someone pays us an awful lot more money to make it in something else.'

Getting it right

At the conference, Quested also revealed that the BBC will be HDR mastering to a 1,000-nit reference ('this seems to be the sweet spot') using Dolby's Professional Reference Monitor (PRM-4220) and HLG Look-Up Tables. 'This will do for televisions for quite some time to come, even though we know TV manufacturers will want to get 10,000 nits onto their screens soon.'

He adds: 'What's really bad is when you see a TV vendor pushing brightness for sales and the content can't cope with it. We need to keep up with what the TV manufacturers are doing, but let's have a standard that lasts a little longer than the period of time it takes to get to press.'

Quested says he's sympathetic to complaints that overly-enthusiastic HDR can be uncomfortable to watch. He says a lot of work has been done by the EBU and SMPTE to get firm mastering guidelines, but his own rule of thumb is very simple: 'If it hurts your eyes in the grade, it will hurt the eyes of the audience – so don't do it!'

In the meantime, the BBC is prepping a new round of 4K iPlayer HDR trials. 'When the Sky Q box gets its act together on HDR, which hopefully will be very, very soon, we will be able to see the trials we did on iPlayer working across a much greater range of displays,' he promises.



UHD and HDR were the buzzwords at SES's conference

Playlist...

Team *HCC* spins up its disc picks of the month

John Wick: Chapter 2 (Ultra HD BD)

This sequel comes out all-guns-blazing on UHD Blu-ray with its dazzling 4K visuals and explosive Atmos audio. It's also the only way to get the film uncut in the UK.



Get Out (All-region BD)



Jordan Peele's smart sociological horror is supported by a collection of thoughtful extra features on this hi-def platter.

Fast Times at Ridgemont High (Region B BD)



The seminal 1982 teen flick stands the test of time rather well on this welcome Blu-ray re-release.

Mickey One (All-region BD)



Revisiting Arthur Penn's arty 1965 noir pastiche is easier than ever thanks to this restored Blu-ray.

A Quiet Passion (Region B BD)



A sumptuous HD presentation of Terence Davies' compelling and witty Emily Dickinson biopic.

At the 'plex...

Heading out to see a flick?
Catch these this month

Annabelle: Creation



August 11: This second spin-off for *The Conjuring*'s deadly dolly turns back the clock to reveal its origin. While the first *Annabelle* film was a dud, the presence of *Lights Out* director David F. Sandberg behind the camera has us expecting good things from this creepy prequel.

The Dark Tower



August 18: A bigscreen follow up to the popular series of novels by Stephen King, this fantasy-horror-Western hybrid stars Idris Elba as gunslinger Roland Deschain and Matthew McConaughey as the nefarious Man in Black.

Logan Lucky

August 25: Steve Soderbergh comes out of feature film retirement to direct Daniel Craig, Channing Tatum, Adam Driver and more in this ensemble heist flick that calls to mind *Ocean's Eleven*, only less glitzy.

The show must go on

Cinema industry is in innovative mood at its European showcase

Team HCC recently made the trek to Barcelona for the annual CineEurope tradeshow held at Centre Convencions International. The show is an exclusively business-to-business convention, where vendors peddle their wares to professional cinema owners. It gives a taste of where the commercial industry is heading, and what tech you may witness in your local multiplex down the line.

Not only did Hollywood studios arrive to push their upcoming film slates for the year, with both screenings and events, numerous manufacturers and service providers offered every conceivable gizmo or software application to the cinema exhibitor clientele. Stands in the convention aisles boasted digital projectors, speaker systems, screens and theatre management system (TMS) applications, plus carpets, seating and soft drink dispensers.

When it comes to projection, the industry is moving towards an HDR future. Market-leading manufacturers Barco, Christie, NEC and Sony all showed off up-to-the-minute laser technology beamers, which are quickly replacing xenon lamp-driven counterparts. Barco's new mid/large auditorium Smart Laser PJ boasts 4K resolution and a staggering 33,000 Lumens of brightness. Meanwhile, NEC's red and blue laser tech 4K projector goes further (35,000 Lumens) and is designed for cinema screens up to a whopping 32m wide.

Sony's cinema division stole the show, though, firstly with an impressive new 4K HDR laser phosphor projector scheduled to launch in August.



Smart Laser PJs on Barco's stand (top); *Valerian...* director Luc Besson takes the stage (bottom)

The company is also incorporating CinemaNext's EclairColor tech into its series of projectors, which allows for heightened contrast and wider colour range – the demo was one of the out-and-out showstoppers.

Combined with its strikingly realistic CLEDIS modular video wall (see HCC #275...), Sony appears to be leading the charge on several fronts.

Remember Cinerama?

Although no UK cinemas have yet adopted it, Barco showcased its three-screen 'Barco Escape' system, which loosely mimics the three-projector Cinerama setup of yore. It uses three DCI-compliant Series II projectors to produce an extra-wide 'boxed' image, but movies must, however, be mastered in the format first...

Meanwhile, veteran of 3D cinema, Real D, in addition to touting its portfolio of image processing tools like motion- and detail-enhancing True Motion and True Image, once again dazzled with its Ultimate Screen, which ramps up brightness considerably for 3D (and 2D image playback).

A further show highlight came from Ukrainian corp Mag-Audio – its MAG THOR subwoofer aims to allow moviegoers to hear and feel 'subsonic and physically perceived sound features previously unavailable.' Featuring a 30in driver, 5,000W amp and claiming a peak SPL of 145dB, it may be too much to hope a domestic version is launched.

Hisense 4K TV plugs size gap

Chinese manufacturer claims the leap between 40in and 50in screens is too large

Do you find 50in TVs too big for your room and 40in displays too small? If so, then you're not alone. Citing research claiming that the gap between 40in and 50in screens is simply too large for many consumers, Hisense has set out to rectify the problem by launching the 45N5750, which it claims is the world's first 45in 4K TV.

'We're delighted to offer this market-first product, it's a testament to our product team here at Hisense UK and around the world that we are able to spot these trends and cater to them so responsively and successfully,' states Hisense UK deputy managing director Howard Grindrod.

Priced around £540, the 45N5750 LED/LCD flatscreen offers support for HDR 10 and HLG HDR display technologies. Smart functionality is powered by a Quad Core processor and includes a full web browser, Netflix, Amazon Prime, YouTube and BBC iPlayer. Meanwhile, Anyview Cast and Anyview Stream compatibility allows users to view content seamlessly from their smartphones, tablets and computers. www.hisense.com

Hisense's 45N5750: Meet the world's first 45in 4K TV



Now with more depth
and more clarity



'This level of clarity and refined detail isn't something we usually hear at this mid-range price – we're really impressed.'



KEF Q350,
What Hi-Fi? August 2017

The new Q Series hi-fi speakers

The eighth iteration of this successful range continues to be centred on our legendary Uni-Q driver array, and is now enhanced with a new system design, beefier low-frequency drivers and a new damped tweeter loading tube. The result is superior bass performance and an even more detailed natural sound. Listen for yourself and experience pleasure in high resolution.

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Extras...

Small items that could make a big impression...

Unchained Melody: The Films of Meiko Kaji



The initial release from the Arrow Books imprint finds Japanese cinema expert Tom

Mes exploring the life, films and even the singing exploits of iconic actress Meiko Kaji. Thorough and fascinating, the book also profiles some of the directors that Kaji worked with throughout her career. Priced £20, this brilliant book is also just the right size to sit next to your *Female Prisoner Scorpion* Blu-ray boxset.

Game of Thrones: Tarot



Wondering what the fates (and/or scriptwriters) have in store for your favourite character from the hit HBO fantasy series? You could try predicting their future with this *Game of Thrones*-themed tarot card set. Authored by UK tarot practitioner Liz Dean and illustrated by Craig Cross, the £22 boxset holds 78 full-colour cards and a 100-page booklet.

Wonder Woman: The Art and Making of the Film



Having given *Suicide Squad* a miss, Titan Books returns with

another glossy look behind the scenes of DC's latest superhero blockbuster. Bursting with exclusive concept art and photographs (plus a nifty bonus from Wayne Enterprises at the end) this £30 hardback offers a neat account of Wonder Woman's journey to the screen.

A Festival of hi-res audio

Riva multiroom speakers pledge to bring sound quality back to the front

As anybody who has seen footage of his infamous rant to the audience at the 1970 Isle of Wight music festival will know, Rikki Farr isn't a man given to mincing his words. And on the subject of mass-market consumer audio, he's quick to let rip: 'There's a treason taking place... by this cheap, pasteurised, compressed, limited crap.' It's a situation that Farr plans to address with the launch of two new multiroom speakers produced by his own company, Riva Audio.

HCC met up with Farr for an audition of the new models – but first ended up chatting about music.

The now 75-year-old was one of the Isle of Wight festival's producers between 1968 and 1970, and an enormous amount of similar work followed; Farr's company, International Tour Services, produced over 4,700 concerts. He also managed legendary clubs like the Marquee and Brave New World, recounting to HCC that he paid The Rolling Stones 'a fiver and a beer each' to play.

During his music career, Farr worked with The Beatles (he met John Lennon when living in Germany in the early-'60s), Led Zeppelin, Jimi Hendrix, Bob Dylan, Pink Floyd, The Band, Peter Dinklage, Metallica, Bob Marley, King Crimson, Guns N' Roses... and even Barry Manilow. Farr insists these musicians have pride in the live sound that fans pay to hear. Paul McCartney, for example, would 'sit in different seats in the arena' while having the PA adjusted. Bob Marley, we're told, wanted to 'feel the bass coming through the stage... and hear the girls when they were wailing.'

Affordable ambition

This pursuit of sound quality – and dissatisfaction with existing systems at an affordable price level – is the impetus behind the Riva Audio brand. Farr denounces some rival product as 'phonies' that fail to deliver 'the beautiful nuance of sound' – since when did those on modest incomes have bad hearing?' he asks.

Farr formed the California-based corp with engineer Don North, who had previously worked with



Rikki Farr: The former concert producer believes most affordable speakers fail to capture 'the beautiful nuance of sound'

firms like Boston Acoustics and Harman Multimedia. North, explains Farr, designed transducers for 'the big McIntosh speakers that

cost £100,000 a pair' – at Riva, he came up with 'Trillium', a proprietary system that works to expand sonic presentation and deliver a stereo image much larger than would be assumed from the speaker size. North's team prototyped the technology with analogue electronics, migrated it to DSP and then carried out a process of refinement.

The most recent fruits of this work (following the earlier standalone Riva S) are the £225 Arena multiroom speaker and its bigger brother, the £450 Festival. They look like conventional multiroom/Bluetooth speakers. And, yes, they do feature Bluetooth, plus analogue line inputs and USB playback/charging. But there's a bit more to their versatility. For a start, they're used in conjunction with the Google Home app (Google, according to Farr, considers Riva products to be 'flagships'). A Riva speaker is essentially treated as a Chromecast audio device, so you can cast your music from compatible apps including Plex (great for DLNA playback), Spotify and TuneIn Radio. Airplay is supported, too.

Our demo was surprisingly effective, even the 50W Arena – which squeezes six drivers into its modest frame – delivered a full and satisfying sound. Bass is articulate; there's little of the 'one-note' characteristic often associated with smallscale active speakers. And the more powerful eight-driver Festival (which measures 36cm wide) delivers a much bigger, almost laws-of-physics bothering soundstage, filling a room with a stereo image that appears to emanate from separate enclosures.

Where the Riva speakers enjoy an advantage over some of the competition is their hi-res talents: both feature 192kHz/24-bit playback capability. And, through Riva's 'WAND' app, they can be configured to deliver stereo or left/right channel audio (the app

also offers custom EQ settings). At our demo, two Arena speakers were operated as a stereo pair, and the imaging improved considerably.

While the Festival will likely sit permanent on a desk or worktop, the smaller Arena seems ripe for moving around the house. However, there's no internal battery – an external rechargeable battery cradle is an option, priced at £90.



Riva's Festival, Arena and Arena battery pack also come in white

This month's top 10 news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...



1 Disney confirms 4K *Guardians*
Disney has finally boarded the 4K bandwagon with the announcement that it will release Marvel's *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* on UHD Blu-ray in the UK on September 4. It's not all good news, though, as Disney UK has told HCC that we won't be getting a 4K Blu-ray release of *Pirates of the Caribbean: Salazar's Revenge* on this side of the Atlantic, despite the fact that the studio is releasing the film on Ultra HD Blu-ray in the US.

2 Arcam acquired
British audio brand Arcam has been bought out by Harman International Industries. The company joins AKG, Harman/Kardon, Infinity, JBL, Mark Levinson and Revel as part of Harman's Lifestyle Audio division. Harman itself was acquired by Samsung earlier this year in an \$8bn deal.

3 Exceeding expectations
Netflix is in a celebratory mood after seeing its subscription base exceed expectations and grow from 94m at the start of 2017 to around 104m in Q2. The streaming service has also revealed that international users now make up 50.1 per cent of its total membership.

4 Talk to your Sony TV
Sony has added support for Amazon Alexa voice control to some of its 2016 and 2017 Android TVs. Echo and Echo Dot owners will be able to turn the TVs on or off and change channels and volume using their voices. For a list of all supported TVs visit https://esupport.sony.com/info/1709/US/EN/#supported_tv.

5 *Star Wars* spin-off tops sales
The Official Charts Company has released a list of the UK's bestselling discs for the first half of the year. *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* leads the field, having shifted 962,000 units. *Harry Potter* spin-off *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* came second with 781,000 units, while *Bridget Jones's Baby* was a close third with 733,000 units. Animated hits *Moana* (476,000) and *Trolls* (458,000) round out the top five.

6 PMC sets laser to stun
Speaker manufacturer PMC is promising a 'more holistic approach' to future drive unit and cabinet design. The company has invested in advanced laser equipment that now enables its engineers to measure the mechanical movement of drive units in situ and fine tune them in real time and in parallel with the cabinets.

7 Bluesound gets bassy
Bluesound's multiroom/hi-res capable Pulse soundbar can now be used in tandem with any active subwoofer via the company's RT100 Wireless Speaker link. This £100 gizmo connects to your sub via analogue input, then seeks out the 'bar using point-to-point wireless technology.

8 Hybrid cable
Lindy Electronics has launched a 50m fibre optic HDMI 'Hybrid' cable, which the brand says enables lengthy runs without the signal degradation typical of standard copper-only designs. Got a big room? Prices start at £210.

9 Monster movie bash
FrightFest returns to the Leicester

Square Cineworld and Prince Charles cinemas from August 24-28. For its 18th year, the horror film festival will be taking over five screens and showing a whopping 53 films, including new *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* prequel *Leatherface* and *Child's Play* sequel *Cult of Chucky*.

10 Comic book complaints
Foul-mouthed superhero *Deadpool* has picked up yet another accolade. The film generated more complaints to the BBFC than any other movie during 2016, with 51 people contacting the organisation to grumble about the film's violence, bad language and sex references. Fellow 15-rated comic book flick *Suicide Squad* received 30 complaints, although most of these were from kids who couldn't get in to see it and parents who (we're not sure why) expected the film to get a lower classification.



Premiere...

What's happening in the world of TV and films...

Lively lands spy film



The Shallows star Blake Lively will play an assassin hunting those responsible for the loss of her family in the bigscreen adaptation of UK novelist Mark Burnell's acclaimed spy thriller *The Rhythm Section*. The film will be directed by Reed Munro and produced by the team behind the James Bond franchise.

Suicide... sequel

Meanwhile, *The Shallows* helmer Jaime Collet-Serra looks set to succeed David Ayer as the director of DC Comics' *Suicide Squad* sequel. The Spanish filmmaker is still best known for his collaborations with Liam Neeson, including *Unknown*, *Non-Stop* and *Run All Night*, so, maybe he can convince the actor to don some spandex.

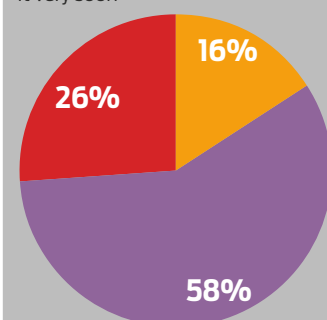
Tom takes flight again

A July 2019 release date has been announced for the *Top Gun* sequel. Directed by Joseph 'Oblivion' Kosinski, *Top Gun: Maverick* will see Tom Cruise's character teaching a new generation of hotshot pilots.

We asked...

Is your home cinema setup ready for Dolby Vision?

■ Yes ■ No
■ Not yet – but I'll be upgrading it very soon



Results from www.homecinemachoice.com
Go online for more polling action

It's time to meet your maker

Alien: Covenant → Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment → DVD/Blu-ray/Ultra HD Blu-ray

Director Ridley Scott continues to explore the origins of cinema's most terrifying extraterrestrial with his *Prometheus* sequel, *Alien: Covenant*. Following the crew of a colony ship who encounter a familiar face *and* a new breed of terror on an uncharted world, the film is available to own on Digital Download from September 4, followed by DVD, Blu-ray and 4K Blu-ray on September 18. Extras include a director's commentary, deleted/extended scenes, three prequel videos and a *Master Class: Ridley Scott* documentary.



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Face to Face

Topics of discussion on the *HCC* Facebook page

On *T2: Judgement Day* on 4K (and 3D) Blu...



Bought it the second it went up. It's cheap really – if you bought the discs separately it would be close to £115.

Mike Wadkins

3D should be good but as for the Endo Arm, I'll pass.

Geoff Collins

I'll be back for this... Did you see what I did there?

Benny Har-Even

What you're watching on your home cinema...



Harryhausen marathon with the *Sinbad* Blu-ray box and maybe *Jason* and *The Argonauts* too.

Matt Greaves

An Italian horror selection:

Antichrist, *Slaughter Hotel*, *Lizard in a Women's Skin* and *Mania*.

Alan Hoare

Power Rangers again, in Ultra HD Dolby Vision.

Andy Leech



May have to be a blast from the past and a John Carpenter double-bill with *The Fog* followed by *Halloween* on Blu-ray.

Chris Starr

As much as I enjoy the new 4K stuff I'm lowering the projector screen and going for *Jurassic Park 3D* and *Earth vs the Flying Saucers*, finished off with *The Great Wall* – in 3D, of course.

Stefano Pascuzzi

Peppa Pig, *Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom*, *Fireman Sam* and *Paw Patrol*. The same as every weekend. And people ask why I have so many headphones...

HCC's Ed Selley



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Back of the 'net

Trailers, technology and more to check out on the web



Dreaming of electric sheep

Blade Runner 2049's October release date is so close you can almost smell the popcorn, and Warner has seen fit to release a new trailer that offers a bit more detail (perhaps too much) than the original teaser. Synth score and stylised visuals indicate that this is very much aiming to complement its predecessor.

youtu.be/dZOal_Fn5o4



Alexa? Alexa? Alexa!

For anyone with an Amazon Echo who hasn't ventured far beyond asking the Alexa AI to open Spotify, this vid from YouTuber Rodrick Burke gives an example of what can be achieved with plenty of integrated gear. It also gives an example of how voice control can be frustrating at times...

youtu.be/V7WfxI3ecVI



A galaxy far, far away. Again

More *Star Wars*, with the first batch of Disney's 16-part online animated short series (*Forces of Destiny*) ready for viewing. The unfussy 2D visuals are lovely, and the two-and-a-half-minute running times perfect for a quick watch. Ewoks, BB-8, Stormtroopers, Padme – they're all here!

youtu.be/TVVa2g4X4MU



Apes together strong!

An informative 15-minute interview piece (featuring star Andy Serkis, writer/director Matt Reeves and more) from Film4 focusing on *War for the Planet of the Apes*. If you've missed this trilogy-concluding flick at the multiplex, this'll excite you enough to stick the 4K Blu-ray on pre-order.

youtu.be/oFwQkZpo4NO



TOP PICK

A galaxy far, far away

The first two movies in the re-energised *Star Wars* franchise have been spectacular successes – and we're all hoping...*The Last Jedi* continues the run. The film's not out until Christmas, but Disney has kindly released a behind-the-scenes production vid to tide you over.

youtu.be/5ferDFwSOWk



He's back... in 4K!

Terminator hedz can look forward to *T2: Judgement Day* hitting cinemas in 3D this Summer, and then scooping up the flick on both 4K and 3D disc editions courtesy of Studio Canal. Die-hard fans will definitely want this Endo Arm Special Edition package featuring 4K, 3D and Full HD versions.

www.studiocanal.co.uk

OLED embraces swinging '60s

Loewe Bild 5 → www.loewe.tv

German designer Bodo Sperlein is at it again. Having already taken Loewe's TVs back (aesthetically) to the 1920s with the recent Bild 9 flatscreen, the brand's creative director has drawn inspiration from 1960s décor for the look of the Bild 5. Available in 55in and 65in screen sizes, this new model represents an attractive entry point for Loewe's OLED 4K TV tech, with prices starting at an affordable £2,990. Supported UHD formats include Dolby Vision, HDR10 and HLG, and an optional soundbar is also available.

CRASH COURSE

The Fate of the Furious – clunk, clink, smash, screech... p104



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CODE V1174

The 10 best things at CES Asia

Jamie Carter reports on some eye-catching tech from the global electronics show

WHY SHOULD LAS Vegas get all the attention? January's CES in Sin City sets the tone for the home entertainment industry for the rest of the year, with a slew of new products unveiled that are mostly made – and increasingly conceived and designed – in China. So why not go straight to source?

Now in its third year, CES Asia in Shanghai this Summer lacked the really big global brands (there was no Sony, Samsung or LG), but Microsoft, Huawei and Hisense all took part alongside 450 exhibitors from 22 countries. And among the drones, self-driving cars and endless earphones were some alluring home entertainment and cinema products that jostled for attention in the mighty Shanghai New International Expo Center (SNIEC).

Inovel Edge HV700 laser TV

Will so-called 'screenless TVs' catch on in home cinema? Some think so; analysts at Futuresource predict that ultra-short-throw projectors like this one from Chinese brand Inovel will account for a whopping three-quarters of global projector sales for home cinemas by 2021 – and China is where they're being born. When placed just 25cm away from the wall, Inovel's DLP-powered, Android OS-based one-box pumps out a Full HD image in laser-delivered 3,500 Lumens brightness, with the makers claiming that it can easily reproduce the REC.709 colour gamut standard. Sensibly building-in a JBL Cinema soundbar and shipping with a 100in

Fresnel microcrystalline hard screen, it's on sale in China for a bargain £2,300.

Konka T98 LED TV

Somehow hidden away in a corner on Chinese brand Konka's stand was a field-of-vision-filling 98in 8K LED TV. Built around an Android interface, the T98 actually comes in two versions; there's also a 4K resolution model available in China for just over £15,000. Aiming more downmarket, Konka was also showing off its 4.7mm-slim, 4K HDR-ready OLED65V92U, which ships with a separate soundbar and subwoofer, plus a curved version, the OLED65V91U. Konka is a name that UK buyers may one day become familiar with; it's one of its home nation's up-and-coming brands already selling TVs to 100 countries.

DPVR E3 VR headset

Virtual reality hasn't yet caught on as quickly as its evangelists would like. Two reasons are annoying cables, and headsets too heavy to be worn for more than 20 minutes at a time. Cue the E3, which launched at CES Asia and clocks in at just shy of 300g. Using a laser positioning system and fitted with AMOLED panels sourced from Samsung, with a resolution of 2,560 x 1,440 (Quad HD, which is about 40 per cent more pixels than most other VR headsets), the E3's 110-degree field of view impressed in our eyes-on demo,



The Edge HV700 ultra-short-throw laser projector (top) is styled to blend in with your hi-fi gear; DPVR's E3 headset ups the VR pixel count and streams games from Steam



with one intriguing use being the recreation of a cinema-style screen for watching movies at the multiplex, but virtually. Gaming VR content for the E3 comes via the Steam VR and VRonline platforms; no smartphone required. It's priced at around £240.

Coolux X6 mini 3D projector

Barely bigger than an iPad and weighing just over half a kilo, this is one of the most portable mini DLP projectors around. Set to sell for £350 approx and able to produce an image as small as 20in

CES Asia takes place over three days across the four halls of Shanghai's New International Expo Center

Hisense revamps its ULED range with 55in and 65in HDR screens

and as big – in theory – as 250in, the X6's 1,200 x 800-pixel images were nevertheless looking maxed-out at about 100in from 2.7m on the show floor. Its LED lightsource is long-lasting at 30,000 hours, although its low brightness (rated at 1,000 Lumens) means you're going to need blackout conditions. There's a small speaker built-in and 3D playback is supported. It's hardly high-end home cinema, but could be just the ticket for an occasional or budget bigscreen experience.

Hisense N8700 ULED TV

It may still be an emerging brand in the UK better known for affordable 4K TVs, but Hisense has big plans. Already the third-biggest TV manufacturer in the world, it used CES Asia to launch its high-end N8700 range. As with previous flagship models, these are dubbed ULED TVs, but remain LED-backlit LCD sets, albeit with a suite of image processing improvements. Available in 55in and 65in, they claim a 1,000-nit peak brightness and utilise local dimming to seek out image highlights; other features include an icon-heavy smart portal, slinky bezel design and picture tech Hisense calls 'HDR Supreme'. Expect them to be promoted endlessly over the next 12 months, as Hisense just struck a deal to sponsor next year's FIFA World Cup.

Grand Artisans Journeyman Series

The thought of placing a large black box just below a projector screen will appal some, but Grand Artisans' ultra-short-throw PJ attempt is better-looking than most. Critical specs include a 4,000 Lumens brightness rating suited to daytime viewing, and Full HD projections from a distance of 30cm. Oh, and a built-in sound system from no less than Onkyo.

Changhong Q3R 8K TV

First shown at CES in January, it's likely that this 65in 8K TV will find a bigger and more eager audience in its home country, which is all set to embrace the four-times-better-than-4K tech before any other nation. Another TV using Google's >



Best in show?

Put IFA in your diary for a consumer-friendly expo...

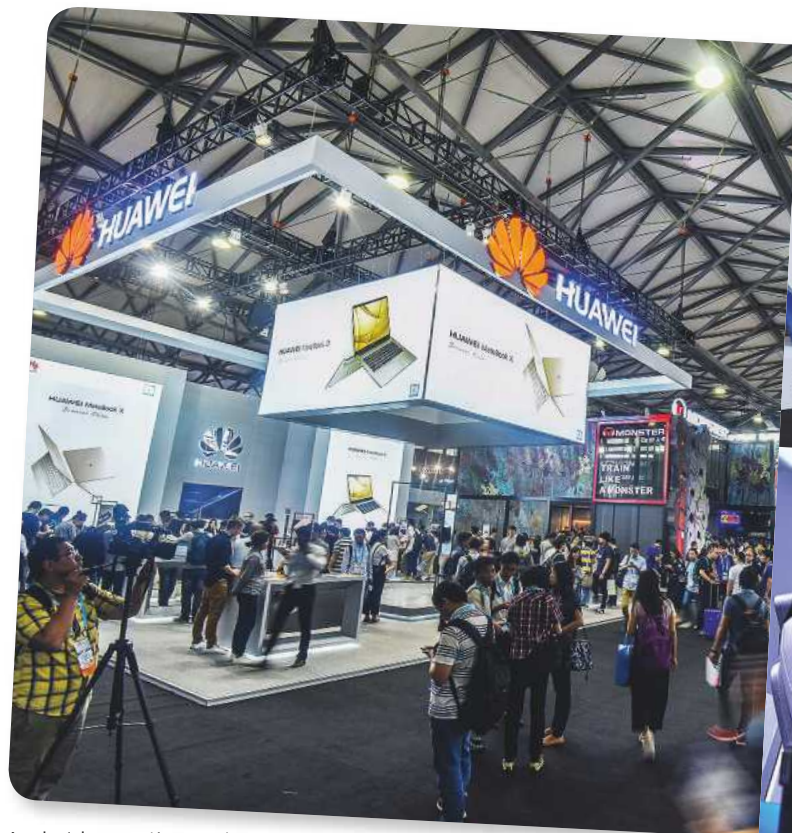


Easier to travel to than CES Asia (Berlin rather than Shanghai) and featuring most of the major AV players (Sony, Samsung, LG, Panasonic, JVC, Pioneer, Onkyo, Yamaha, Philips, Harman, Optoma, etc), Europe's largest technology show is a key date in the calendar. Even better, it's open to the public and tickets are well-priced, costing €17.50 for a day pass and children under six allowed in for free. It's not all AV either – there's plenty of innovation around smartphones, cameras and kitchen appliances to ogle at.

The show is open to all from September 1 to September 6, with preceding days reserved for press/trade visitors.

Fancy going? Check out <http://b2b.ifa-berlin.com> for info.

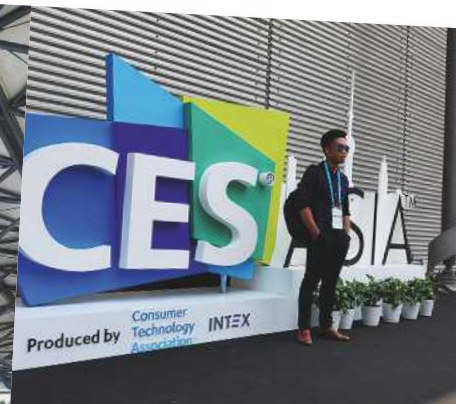
Klipsch's Reference Premiere range – speakers for space-starved AV fans



Android operating system (proprietary platforms seem out of fashion in China), the Q3R's 7,680 x 4,320 pixels certainly resulted in blisteringly sharp demonstrations, although it remains to be seen if 65in or bigger will be the sweet spot for 8K displays. With that in mind, Changhong also flaunted a 98in variant.

Klipsch Reference Premiere on-wall speakers

Designed to be gathered around your wall-hung TV or projector screen, these on-wall speakers come in matt black ultra-slim cabinets. Klipsch's four latest additions to its Reference Premiere Designer series were on a static demo in Shanghai, with the range-topper being the passive RP-440D-SB soundbar, which mounts four 3.5in mid/bass drivers and a trio of 1in horn-loaded tweeters into



Virtual Reality: no 21st century tech show is complete without it...

its front baffle. Various driver configurations adorn the RP-640D and smaller RP-240D L/C/R speakers, and RP-140D satellites. All models include four-way keyhole mounts and rotating logos for system flexibility.

Pico Neo CV

Here's another VR headset where the trend is not only light, but wireless. Powered by a Qualcomm 820 Snapdragon processor of the type found in smartphones, the Android-based Pico Neo CV packs gyroscope, accelerometer and proximity sensors that warn you if you venture too close to a wall in the real world while slaying dragons in a virtual one. It claims 1,280 x 1,080 pixels per eye and a 102-degree field of view, but there's no word yet on price. With rounded edges and a white and grey colour scheme, there's a distinct Apple-esque feel about this headset, which is already making those cable-heavy rigs of VR's early days – last year, actually – look clumsy.

Sound Dimension aiFi Ai-1 speakers

Many think of Bluetooth speakers as perfect for beach parties and BBQs, but these wireless, battery-powered blasters from Sweden via Shanghai have more ambition – they can be daisy-chained and stacked on top of each other to create a much larger system. Still not convinced? Buy three for different rooms in your house, then place them side-by-side to create an impromptu soundbar, or place around a desktop monitor to create a decent soundstage for gaming or movies. There's even an optical audio input for your BD deck. Odd name, though... ■

Hygge.

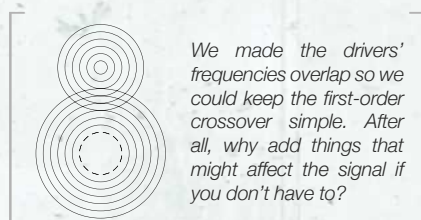
Who says it needs to be all about lamps and couches?

“What are you doing for your 40th birthday?”, everyone asked. We thought about it and decided that since we aren't wild about lavish cakes (although we do love a tasty fastelavnsbolle), we'd celebrate a little differently. Even the *thought* of making new speakers makes us warm and fuzzy, so that's what we chose to do.

Meet the Special Forty: hygge for your ears.

Laurels aren't for resting on, which is why we gave Dynaudio Labs free rein to play. (It gave our accountants a heart attack.) Our only instruction: take our classic tech and see what you'd do differently this time. Their design was nothing short of genius.

They took our classic Esotar 28mm soft-dome tweeter design, put our DSR* precision coating on it, and then **machined an aerodynamic vent** directly into the powerful neodymium magnet. Then they added more damping material and another pressure-release conduit. Take it apart and look behind it: it's a work of art (except please don't; we spent ages putting it together).

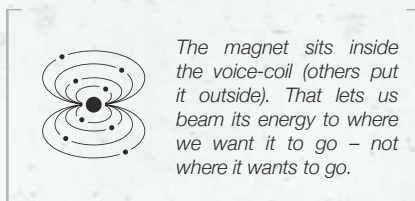


We called the new tweeter the Esotar Forty, and it's exclusive to this speaker.

We also gave the Special Forty a new woofer, made from our own super-stable Magnesium Silicate

Polymer. Its dome is coupled directly to the voice-coil for incredibly precise midrange performance. That's aided by the **new AirFlow Basket** – an aerodynamically shaped chassis that optimises rear airflow and isolates the driver from unwanted vibrations and resonances.

The woofer also has a **custom magnetic field** – one we created in the lab – thanks to a unique hybrid magnet system. It's part ferrite, part neodymium, and it physically manipulates flux to bend it around the voice-coil for greater power and efficiency.



Those innovations mean the tweeter can reach down to 1000Hz, and the woofer up to 4000Hz. That overlap means smoother integration between treble and bass, and **performance that borders on mesmerising**.

We don't want to bore you with the maths, so here's the English: the extra air movement and flux containment means we have more control over how the tweeter and woofer move. And that means **a more detailed, precise and honest performance**. Just what we (and you) want.

This is a simple-looking speaker. Sure. But wait until you see its Grey Birch High Gloss and Red Birch High Gloss finishes. We painstakingly laminate Finnish Birch veneers many, many, *many* times and cross-cut

them to achieve this striking pattern. Then we use special stains to bring it out even further. Nice, isn't it.



We want to know what you think.

Join our Special Forty group and together we'll take our technology to the next level. That's right: you can be actively involved in shaping the future of our R&D. And you might even find your idea making it into our next-generation speakers. There's a fastelavnsbolle – and warm feelings of hygge – in it for you if you do.

www.dynaud.io/SpecialFortyForum

**Special occasion.
Special speaker.
Special Forty.**



*Wondering what 'DSR' stands for? It's Dynaudio Secret Recipe. And that's all you're getting out of us – apart from a fantastic tweeter, of course.

A WORLD OF BLU-RAY DELIGHTS

While the UK disc market is packed with goodies, sometimes it pays to shop abroad. **Team HCC** heads to the US and beyond to highlight the labels and releases dedicated collectors should keep an eye on

Criterion Collection



THIS SPECIALIST LABEL has long been a fan favourite, dating back to its origins as a purveyor of premium LaserDiscs. It's maintained that reputation through DVD and now Blu-ray, releasing extras-packed editions of classic/cult movies, typically with restored 1080p transfers based upon the best-quality source material available.

Of course, Criterion Collection is now also a UK label as of last year, but its catalogue is far more extensive Stateside – where its discs are Region A-locked.

Numbered spines have been used ever since the first Criterion release (#1 being Jean Renoir's *Grande Illusion*), and the collection currently reaches #875 with more scheduled. Yet many are for DVD releases that are now out of print, so keen hoarders hoping for a fully-numbered Blu-ray library are out of luck.

Numerous Criterion titles are also sold in the UK via different distributors (Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* has been put out on Blu-ray by BFI, for example), but in many cases Criterion's efforts



Martin Sheen and Sissy Spacek star in Terence Malick's 1973 road-trip masterpiece *Badlands*

outshine those of others. Consider Nicholas Roeg's majestic 1971 drama *Walkabout* – while Criterion's Blu-ray (spine #10) is loaded with extras, Universal's hi-def release is a bare-bones offering. Or iconic chiller *Don't Look Now* (1973, Roeg again), which fans have raced to acquire due to its superior image quality over a preceding UK version.

And then there's the dizzying range of US Criterion releases that are exclusive to that region, spanning decades of cinema. Choice titles include Jean Cocteau's *La Belle et la Bête* (1946, aka *Beauty and the Beast*); Wes Anderson's *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (2004); Ang Lee's Civil War western *Ride With The Devil* (1999); Terence Malick classic *Badlands* (1973); Michelangelo Antonioni's enigmatic mod masterpiece *Blow-Up* (1966); the original *Godzilla* (1954); John Ford western *Stagecoach* (1939); Rolling Stones documentary *Gimme Shelter* (1970); and Dutch chiller *The Vanishing* (1988).

Put another way, if there's a movie you've been struggling to track down on UK Blu-ray, there's a good chance Criterion can help...

www.criterion.com

Black-and-white BD beauties: *La Belle et la Bête* (below) and *Stagecoach* (bottom)



The Life Aquatic... one of a number of Wes Anderson movies exclusive to Criterion Collection

Twilight Time



FOUNDED BY FILM historian Nick Redman and restoration supervisor Brian Jamieson in 2011, boutique

Blu-ray label Twilight Time has quickly established itself as a friend of film geeks all around the world. Over the course of six years, Twilight Time has launched a cornucopia of classic films on the format licensed from Hollywood heavyweights Twentieth Century Fox, Sony Pictures, MGM and Warner Bros., each release limited to just 3,000 (or, in a few cases, 5,000) copies. Couple these limited production runs with top-quality extra features and new restorations of many of the movies and it's no wonder that a large number of its titles are now out-of-print – and command sizeable sums of money on the secondary market...

Some of Twilight Time's most popular titles have subsequently been released through labels on this side of the Atlantic (examples include Eureka's *Fright Night* and Indicator's *Body Double* Blu-rays), but there's still a large number that haven't seen the blue light of a BD deck's laser on our shores, or are simply available from the label in superior packages.

Among Twilight Time's treasure trove of desirable Blu-rays are Sam Peckinpah's gritty Western *Major*



Dundee; John Ford's American Revolution era adventure *Drums Along the Mohawk*; David Lynch's pulpy road movie *Wild at Heart*; Oliver Stone's New West thriller *U Turn*; Ken Loach's hard-hitting drama *Carla's Song*; and the Rita Hayworth 3D musical *Miss Sadie Thompson*.

There's no hard and fast rule when it comes to Blu-ray region and Twilight Time – any region-coding decisions are made by the film licensors, not the label. So while many of its discs are all-region, it's worth checking individual titles before importing just to be on the safe side.

www.twilighttimemovies.com



Twilight Time's *Wild at Heart* BD is far superior to the UK release



Want to enjoy Rita Hayworth in 3D? Then you'll need to import *Miss Sadie Thompson* on Blu-ray



In addition to its stereoscopic encode, *The Mask 3-D* Blu-ray is also loaded with goodies – including a bonus 3D short

1953's *Those Redheads from Seattle* was the first 3D musical, beating *Kiss Me Kate* into US cinemas by a month



Kino Lorber



A US LABEL offering a varied selection of disc releases of the kind of films bigger distributors ignore – think silent movies, Roger Corman-produced cheapies, documentaries and world cinema. Kino Lorber is perhaps most noteworthy, however, for its slowly growing catalogue of vintage 3D. If you have a love of stereoscopic home cinema, you can't afford to ignore it.

Working with 3-D Film Archive, the restoration outfit set up by Bob Furmanek in the early 1990s with the aim of 'saving and preserving our stereoscopic film heritage' (and responsible for the 3D restorations of *Creature from The Black Lagoon* and *Dial M for Murder* released elsewhere), Kino Lorber has brought a mini-library of classic (and not-so-classic...) 3D features to Blu-ray.

Releases include *The Mask 3-D*, a bonkers 1961 Canadian-made psychedelic horror movie, featuring an occult mask that causes its wearer, Dr. Barnes, to experience horrifying visions – the moments where the film really earns its 3D chops; 1953 musical *Those Redheads from Seattle*, which marries its 3D presentation to Technicolor visuals; and 1966 science-fiction caper *The Bubble*, originally released in cinemas boasting of '4-D Space Vision' technology, and with a storyline latterly reimagined by Stephen King's *Under the Dome*. Fancy a retro 3D triple-bill?

Note that, as with Twilight Time, region-coding at Kino Lorber seems to be a bit haphazard across all its releases, with some titles Region A-locked, others region-free. And as a US label, you'll need to hunt its discs down online.

www.kinolorber.com



Multiregion BD players

What you need to know...

Are these dodgy?

No. While manufacturers have to ensure decks match the region they're sold in to comply with Blu-ray Disc Association rules, there's nothing to stop a reseller changing a player's capabilities.

Numbers or Letters?

DVDs and Blu-rays are both classified by Region, but to make things more confusing DVD splits the world into six numbered Regions (plus an extra one for international venues such as cruise ships and spacecraft), while BD splits the world into three different Regions designated by letters.

UK DVDs fall into Region 2 (an area which also includes much of Europe, the Middle East and Japan). The UK comes under Region B for Blu-rays (as do mainland Europe, Australia, New Zealand and Africa).

Titles imported from the US may be locked to Region A (Blu-ray) or Region 1 (DVD). Some resellers offer decks that are multiregion for both BD and DVD, while other players may have been 'modded' for just one function. If you're not planning on watching any R1 DVDs, don't pay for the feature.

How do they work?

Modded Blu-ray players typically allow switching from region to region via a simple handset button press, while multiregion DVD switching and playback tends to occur automatically.

Do I need one?

With large numbers of Blu-rays now sold region-free (and all Ultra HD Blu-rays region-free), many home cinephiles are happy to stick with their unmodded player. But an enthusiast with an eye on titles from all over the world should consider investing.

How much are they?

Price premiums aren't massive over the standard version, but vary from seller to seller; you can get a multiregion deck for under £200.

Shout! Factory



THE BRAINCHILD OF a trio of Rhino Records executives, Shout! Factory formed in 2003 and made its start by licensing and releasing cult TV shows like *Freaks and Geeks*, *My So-Called Life* and *Pee-wee's Playhouse* on R1 DVD. While smallscreen content still remains a key part of its catalogue, the last 14 years have seen Shout! become a player on the film scene too, licensing an increasingly eclectic array of movies from the likes of Paramount, Universal and MGM, as well as directly distributing critically-acclaimed indie flicks like 2014's *The Babadook* in the US. Recent Shout! Factory Blu-ray releases that are well worth importing include a Collector's Edition of Walter Hill's *Trespass* (1992) and the six-disc *The Pink Panther Film Collection Starring Peter Sellers* (1964-1982), each loaded with new and archival bonus material – a main feature of the company's output.

The launch of the Scream Factory sub-label in 2012 cemented the company's place as a destination for sci-fi and horror aficionados. Among the must-own gems waiting to be discovered in the 250 or so Blu-rays it has released over the past five years are Collector's Editions of most John Carpenter films



From *Army of Darkness* (above) to *Ginger Snaps* (left), Shout! is an HD haven for fright fans

(including 1993's oft-overlooked *Body Bags*); an *Amityville Horror* Trilogy boxset (with the third film in 3D); *Ginger Snaps*; the *Halloween: The Complete Collection – Limited Edition Boxset*; *RoboCop 2*; *Army of Darkness*; and, of course, the highly sought-after *Nightbreed: The Director's Cut – Limited Edition*.

Shout! Factory is also one of those rare indies to have already stepped into the Ultra HD Blu-ray arena with a series of IMAX features, including *Flight of the Butterflies*, *Humpback Whales*, *Journey to Space* and *Rocky Mountain Express*.

These are, naturally, region-free, but the company's Blu-rays are Region A.

www.shoutfactory.com

All around the world



There are other Blu-ray markets beyond the US, of course – and Australia and Germany are two of the most interesting for UK film fans.



Like the UK and mainland Europe, Australia uses Region B coding for

Blu-ray, so imported titles spin fine on your UK player, and sometimes you just have to go Down Under to get what you want. 1990's *Night of the Living Dead* – Tom Savini's remake of the George A. Romero zombie powerhouse – was given a Blu-ray release there last year by Umbrella Entertainment (having previously only been available via a Limited Edition Region A Twilight Time release). The same label has also issued a Blu-ray for 1988 horror remake *The Blob*. Certain Hammer titles (*Captain Kronos Vampire Hunter*, *The Gorgon* and *Frankenstein Created Woman*) remain Australian Blu-ray only. And *Buck Rogers...* fans will want to snap up the Complete Series BD boxset.

Closer to home, German labels repeatedly issue discs that are capable of raising UK eyebrows.

Captain Kronos... hunts vampires on Blu-ray in Australia



Of particular note are the Blu-ray of Metallica's *Through the Never* concert/concept movie, with added Dolby Atmos audio; *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* on Ultra HD Blu-ray, which generates 4K visuals from 16mm film, features Atmos audio, but ignores HDR; and Nicholas Winding Refn's *Neon Demon*, another non-HDR 4K release. There are also various Ultra HD opera titles on offer in Germany, plus, erm, 'adult' content. A good place to start your hunt is Amazon's German portal.



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ULTRA HD BLU-RAY

The birth of 4K disc has created another reason for home cinephiles to import – a massive difference between the number of titles sold at UK retailers and abroad. Lack of region-coding on UHD platters means importing is a safe option whatever the hardware in your setup. Here's a selection of overseas releases to consider...

Iron Man Trilogy

Thought the imminent release of *Guardians of the Galaxy: Vol 2* marks the 4K debut for Marvel's Cinematic Universe? Think again – German label Concorde Home Entertainment has (surprisingly) secured distribution rights for a boxset release in its home country, bringing the three standalone Tony Stark films to cinema rooms in 4K HDR for the first time. Should you rush to import? Maybe not, as image quality is sub-standard on the first two movies, only really showing the benefits of the format on *Iron Man 3*. But who knows when another release may appear?



Get a full set

Want 3D and 4K in one purchase? Then head Stateside

Most Ultra HD Blu-ray releases don't bundle 3D 1080p versions of their movies, requiring completists to double-dip.

In fact, at the time of writing, there are no '4K + 3D' packages on sale in the UK – the only one confirmed for future release is the £115 T2: *Judgement Day Endo Arm* boxset (see p16). But a few are out in the US, including *Ghostbusters*, *Passengers*, *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk* and *Angry Birds* (all from Sony Pictures), plus an Amazon Exclusive 'gift set' package for Paramount's *Star Trek Beyond*.



Arrival

You'd think one of the best films of last year (and with Denis Villeneuve awarded an Oscar for Best Director) would have been a shoo-in for a UK 4K release, but *Arrival* (the thinking person's sci-fi flick with a beautiful DTS-HD MA 7.1 mix and intentionally muted visuals) remains import-only. Many will have naturally acquired it from the US, but there's also a German release which will have the accompanying Full HD disc locked to Region B, rather than Region A.



Watchmen: The Ultimate Cut

Alan Moore's expansive graphic novel was given solid treatment by director Zack Snyder in 2009, although fans remain divided over the merits of his mammoth Ultimate Cut version, which clocks in at a whopping 215 minutes due to the insertion of the animated *Tales of the Black Freighter* sequences. Oddly, Warner chose that version for a 4K release last year, so it's perhaps only die-hard *Watchmen* who will order a copy.



Ex_Machina

Dredd writer (and *The Beach* novelist) Alex Garland made his directorial debut in 2015 with this slow-burning yet ultimately satisfying sci-fi thriller that has only three main characters, one of which is a robot. Noteworthy for its stark but sophisticated visuals and unusual soundmix (DTS:X-flavoured), it makes for a fine Ultra HD purchase, although all of the movie's excellent extras are housed on the accompanying 1080p disc.



Harry Potter...

Warner Bros. is working in mysterious ways (okay, it's probably based on the immediate availability of assets) regarding its mega wizarding franchise, releasing the final four movies on Ultra HD BD first, before coming back with a second batch (supposedly later this year) beginning with the 2001 series opener. We expect all eight to hit UK shops eventually, but if you want to watch them now (in the wrong order...) head to the US.



Resident Evil: Vendetta

Set in the same universe as the games rather than the live-action movies, this third CG-animated *Resident Evil* flick aims to up the fear factor and feel a little less like watching a 90-minute videogame cut-scene by drafting in *Ju-On/The Grudge* creator Takashi Shimizu to oversee things. For reasons best known to itself, Sony Pictures eschewed an Ultra HD Blu-ray release in the UK, which is especially annoying as the 4K disc released in the US is the studio's first Dolby Vision title.



Keeping Up with the Joneses

Zach Galifianakis and Isla Fisher star in this knockabout 2016 action comedy about a suburban couple who begin to suspect that their new neighbours (Jon Hamm and Gal Gadot) are secret agents. Here in the UK, Fox didn't even bother with a 'regular' BD release, dumping the film on DVD instead. Over in the US, however, the studio has given it the full shebang, partnering 4K HDR visuals with a DTS-HD MA 7.1 mix.



The Divergent Series

Lionsgate's other 'Young Adult' sci-fi franchise may fall some way below *The Hunger Games* in terms of both critical acclaim and popularity, but that hasn't stopped the studio releasing all three films – *Divergent*, *Insurgent* and *Allegiant* – on 4K Blu-ray in the US (as standalone discs and in a '3-Film Collection' boxset). And who knows? If enough people buy them, maybe Lionsgate will be able to finish the story on the bigscreen as originally planned, rather than having to do it as a TV miniseries...



The Girl on the Train

Last year's film adaptation of Paula Hawkins' worldwide bestseller is distributed by Entertainment One in the UK – a label that has yet to show any interest in 4K Blu-ray. However, the US release was handled by Universal Studios, which not only ensured an Ultra HD Blu-ray release, but also resulted in a DTS:X audio upgrade. The film has also been outed on 4K BD in Germany, but that disc sticks to a DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix.



The Fifth Element

Luc Besson's 1997 science-fiction caper has always been an AV-holic's delight, and Sony Pictures has treated it well in the past – adding a Dolby Atmos mix to a 'Mastered in 4K' Blu-ray back in 2015. Now the studio is making fans dip into Besson's future world again, with a native 4K HDR release presumably sourced from that previous 4K master. Sony has also given Besson's superior hitman thriller *Leon* (starring Jean Reno and Natalie Portman) a UHD lease of life across the pond.



The Expendables

The first entry in Sly Stallone's action franchise (starring the man himself as well as Jet Li, Dolph Lundgren, Jason Statham and more) remains the best – partly as it retains the violent edge of the '80s movies it is in essence paying homage to – before two sequels dialled down the aggression. Annoyingly, only *The Expendables 3* has received a UK 4K release. Why? We have absolutely no idea. A boxset would be nice.



3:10 to Yuma

Another Lionsgate title, this James 'Logan' Mangold-directed Western was released earlier this year on UHD Blu in the US but is still absent from UK shops. That's a shame for those only shopping on the high street, as this is a worthwhile retread of the 1957 original (both films are based on an Elmore Leonard short story), with Russell Crowe in fine form as outlaw Ben Wade. For the 4K release, the original multichannel audio has been upgraded to DTS:X.

'My childhood was full of playing with sound'



Jeremy Bowker has worked as a sound designer/effects editor on Hollywood blockbusters from *Super 8* to *Rogue One*. Here he tells **Martin Dew** a few trade secrets

How did you get involved in becoming a sound designer, and what were you doing before?

Directly before *Skywalker* [Sound] I was at the Vancouver Film School studying sound design. Before that I was studying percussion at the University of Idaho. Even before that, I now realize that my childhood was full of playing with sound

and being fascinated with taking sound out of one context and putting it into another. Playing a low note repeatedly on a piano and holding down the sustain pedal offered more entertainment than it should for a normal five-year-old. Making movies of a model train set with dramatic lighting – and adding real train sound effects from an effects library – was a lot of fun, too. Once I was a teen I graduated

to manipulating the speed of my mother's answering machine and pretending I was on a farm with mooing cows in the background, or crumpling paper and pretending that the answering machine itself was on fire...

As far as my entrance to Skywalker Sound, Randy Thom [Director of Sound Design] was my initial 'foot in the door'. We met at a lecture he was giving and, frankly, I thought that was the last I'd see of him. To my surprise I ended up landing an internship with him and it was one of the best educations I've ever had. Since then, Skywalker hasn't been able to get rid of me!

You're regularly credited on movies as 'supervising sound editor' and 'sound designer' – what's the difference?

The term 'supervising sound editor' can apply to someone who is coordinating dialogue or sound effects. Usually there are two supervisors on a movie; one person is overseeing the dialogue (including ADR) and the other is in charge of the sound effects (including Foley). Although, depending on the crew, responsibilities can be divided up differently.

A sound designer is often a supervisor who is involved with overseeing the general aesthetic of the sound effects and has the ability to create sounds that don't exist in the real world. There are also times when a sound designer is called in to create sounds, but are not tasked with leading the crew.

How did you develop your skills?

Those skills will always be a work in progress. So far, it's just been the process of making a lot of mistakes, but having the ear to hold on to the mistakes that create something interesting that supports the story the filmmaker's telling. I'm lucky enough to work with talented people who approach sound in different ways; new ideas are often tossed around over a cup of coffee and thus new challenges arise.

Do you now work full-time at Skywalker Sound?

I'm freelance like most of the people at Skywalker, but I've been lucky enough to have full-time work for the last 10 and a half years. Every once in a while I'll pop down to Los Angeles for a bit of editorial and design with a picture department or a month or two on a mix, but most often the work is originated through Skywalker.

How is sound captured on a film set – and how much of that actually gets used in the mixing process?

It's often captured with a boom microphone above and lavalier microphone attached to an actor's body. The sound itself is recorded separately from the camera on an audio recorder – both the camera and the recorded audio share metadata that can later be used to synchronize the two. Down the road a dialogue editor will sort through all of the audio recorded on set, clean it up and take note of any lines that need to be recorded (again) by an actor in a studio.



Bowker was co-sound designer on Robert Zemeckis' WW2 thriller *Allied*

I'm usually more on the sound effects side of things but the amount of production sound used in the final mix greatly depends on the film. If there are lots of fans blowing hair around, generators, planes, (you name it...), it's highly likely that the dialogue will need to be recorded again.

However, I have seen films where both the director and production mixer valued what they were capturing on set and most of the dialogue could be used.

How do Foley and ADR play into a final mix?

Foley is the recording of sound effects, usually associated with human movements, in sync to the picture (often in a controlled studio environment). It's generally broken down into two categories, being footsteps and props. Footsteps is pretty self explanatory. Props refers to anything that people touch (grabbing, sitting, etc). This is all necessary since, on set, the production mixer is mainly concerned with only picking up the actor's dialogue and it's often the case that something on set may look natural but in reality sounds hollow and cheap. The first thing I notice whenever I hear Foley applied to a reel for the first time is it seems to bring all of the little details on screen to life.

Additional dialogue recording (ADR) or 'looping' involves re-recording the actor(s) in a studio. As I said, this can be because there was noise on set, or the director wants a different performance or a different line of dialogue. I'm sure there are other reasons, too. The dialogue mixer has the task of making the audience believe that the ADR isn't any different than the rest of the dialogue recorded during production.

What's a particularly satisfying creative moment from the last few films you've worked on?

Getting to co-sound design with Randy Thom – on *Allied* – was on my bucket list. There were a few scenes where one of us would work on design and toss it back and forth between each other until it was ready to mix. It was a bit humbling to work side by side with the person who brought me into the industry.





Also, there was an 'ah-ha!' moment on *Allied* with some of the guns. There was something about how the guns sounded on set that the director, Robert Zemeckis, was connecting with. We then realized that part of the signature sound he liked was a lavalier mic, on one of the actors, distorting in a unique way when the production guns fired. Using that as one of the main design ingredients then created the desired effect.

On Pixar's *Lou* [the accompanying short for *Cars 3*, out now in cinemas], the job of creating expressive and endearing sounds for a character made of children's lost and found items was a challenge. We recorded absolutely everything that you might find on a playground and more. It ended up being a symphony of items that played off of each other, almost like a strange drum set. There were also times when Lou needed to express a specific emotion (but not with a human-like voice). After a bit of experimenting, we found success with using Lou's slinky. For this we recorded and altered everything from several slinkies to anything small and metal that could sustain and change pitch. That process was ridiculously fun and, in the end, rewarding.

How do you set about recording or creating new sounds that no one has ever heard before?

By always carrying an audio recorder! It's amazing how many opportunities pop up when people know that you're always interested in recording. Someone with a bad cough, a malfunctioning motorcycle, a dog that sounds like it's trying to talk... it's all out there waiting to be recorded.

Beyond that there's a lot of experimenting with layering sounds in different ways and, of course, altering them with tools like pitch change, reversing, EQ, reverb, etc.

The end result is a composite of sound that creates something new and often unexpected. Then at some point you end up asking yourself if the sound is striking the right emotional chord and fits within the context of the story.

Is there a particular software suite or 'black box' that makes your life easier?

For field recording, I love using a 'mid-side' mic setup. This can be easily decoded into stereo or you can

***Apocalypse Now:* 'The mix and sound design pushed both artistic and technical envelopes'**



grab either of the mono feeds (which are mics picking up drastically different angles).

Pro Tools [software suite from Avid Technologies] is mainly what I use every day. And iZotope has some great tools that have opened some creative doors, like extracting very specific parts of sounds and then using those ingredients for designing new audio.

Has it been a challenge to mix films with immersive audio systems like Dolby Atmos?

Anytime we adjust to a new technology it's initially a little challenging, but that in itself is exciting. There are a lot of fun opportunities presented with immersive audio, but the main benefit is it's a way to bring the audience into the story even more.

Do you think about how a final mix will sound in a home cinema?

We absolutely do. There's an additional mix for home theatres where each element is carefully considered while monitoring through near-field speakers. During this mix, the goal is to bring the theatre to your home by making small adjustments while retaining the filmmaker's vision.

What recommendations would you have concerning a home cinema setup?

Everyone has different priorities, wants and limitations for their home theatre and the space it occupies. One of the great things about Atmos is it can cater to whatever setup you have.

Of course, it goes without saying that tuning the system itself is incredibly important. And when testing different setups, listening back to immersive material that you're very familiar with is incredibly helpful.

Lastly, what's your favourite movie soundmix?

There are a lot of stunning mixes out there but I have a soft spot for *Apocalypse Now* – the mix and sound design pushed both artistic and technical envelopes. The idea of hearing the world through a character's point of view was taken advantage of to the extreme, along with creative and tasteful use of the boom and stereo surround channels.

Not only is it a great mix, but it was a defining point in film history ■

Sound stable

Making movie magic at home on the ranch...



Skywalker Sound, a division of Lucasfilm and based at the expansive Skywalker Ranch in Marin County, California, has been responsible for some of cinema's most iconic audio. Formed during the mid-1970s as George Lucas and sonic legend Ben Burtt worked on creating a whole galaxy of bleeps, hums and throbs for *Star Wars* – and known then as Sprocket Systems – its soundstages and mixing facilities have since been used for 100s of projects, grabbing 15 Academy Awards in the process. Recent flicks to have been crafted at Skywalker Sound include *The Mummy*, *Kong: Skull Island*, *Moana* and *Guardians of the Galaxy: Volume 2*. Look out for some of its trademark aural genius in this *Winter's Star Wars: The Last Jedi*.

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A cinema with history

TV GOES LARGE

The *Power Rangers* movie aims big on Blu-ray, p94

Where better to enjoy your movie night than in a refurbished screening room with a tradition of famous visitors?



THIS LARGESCALE 32-SEAT cinema room sits on hallowed movie ground. Part of a new £120m residential apartment/townhouse block, it's a careful renovation of the original Art Deco screening room of the Deluxe Film Laboratories, once a facility of Denham Film Studios and a cornerstone of the UK cinema industry.

During its mid-1930s-to-early-1950s heyday, Denham, just a few miles from Pinewood Studios in the London suburbs, birthed countless classic flicks on its stages, including *Brief Encounter*, *Goodbye Mr Chips*, *Great Expectations* and Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet* and *Henry V*. And once the studio shuttered its doors, film processing and editing continued on site, with the likes of Steven Spielberg, Ridley Scott, Peter Jackson, Albert 'Cubby' Broccoli and Stanley Kubrick seeing their projects committed to celluloid at the facility.

A new lease of life

In 2014, however, Deluxe closed the laboratory, as the cinema industry's move from film to digital began to take hold. The Grade II listed site was then acquired by developer Weston Homes, and Hertfordshire-based Install outfit Anonyx commissioned to restore the screening room – giving apartment owners somewhere truly historical to kick back and watch a movie.

As such, the cinema retains an opulent feel, with bespoke velvet furnishings, floor-to-ceiling curtains, vintage lighting and 1930s architectural details. And as a bonus for residents, there's an adjacent Art Deco bar area dressed with film poster art.

The system hardware, however, is more state-of-the-art. A discreet Dolby Atmos/DTS:X speaker array using Sonance in-wall and in-ceiling models is powered and processed by Yamaha's flagship CX/MX series separates – a newly constructed front wall houses Sonance's three-way LCR2 models, plus a pair of Cinema Series subwoofers (with dedicated racked power amps). Immersive visuals come from a SIM2 SIRIO2 projector housed in an external booth, using the brand's M3 long-throw lens to hit the 186in fixed-frame screen from its back-of-the-room position. User-friendly system and lighting control is provided by Control4 and Rako hardware respectively ■

KIT CHECKLIST

SONANCE: 3 x Cinema Series LCR2 in-wall speakers (behind projector screen); 4 x Cinema Series SUR-5S in-ceiling speakers; 2 x VPSUB12-NC (12in in-wall subwoofer and rack amp)

YAMAHA: CX-A5100 11.2-channel processor (Dolby Atmos/DTS:X); MX-A5000 11-channel power amplifier

YAMAHA: BD-S681 Blu-ray player

APPLE TV: Set-top box

SIM 2: SIRIO2 projector with M3 long-throw lens
PROJECTA: PRO-FF-416-4K fixed-frame 186in projector screen

FURMAN: M-10X E power conditioner

RAKO: Smart lighting control

CONTROL4: System control



A. Long-throw theatre

A SIM2 SIRIO2 projector, housed at the back of the cinema, uses the brand's M3 lens to ensure its hi-def image fills the 186in screen

B. Room for all

There's enough space for 32 cinema chairs, spread across six rows, with a fit and finish to complement the room's Art Deco styling

C. Partners in AV crime

Yamaha's CX-A5100 processor and 11-channel MX-A5000 power amplifier unite in the kit rack to drive the Atmos/DTS:X speaker array

D. Matching the mood

In addition to the wall-hung retro lamps, the cinema hides LED lighting runs (including in the ceiling) that can cycle through various hues to set the scene



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The next generation of OLED

Does Philips' new processing magic make this 55-inch stand out from the crowd? See p48

HCC RATINGS KEY...

Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★★☆☆
Dire	★★★☆☆

All prices quoted are approximate and may have changed



Denon re-imagines home theatre for the HEOS faithful. **Steve May** wonders if there are strings attached...

HEOS AVR starts an AV cable cull

With the HEOS AVR, Denon has taken everything you think you know about AV receiver design, and filtered it through a multiroom prism. Pointless legacy inputs and 1990s design chic are traded for multiroom streaming and app control. You don't even have to trail speaker wire around your living room. Few would argue that the AVR is long overdue a rethink, but is this the right direction for tomorrow's home cinema?



1

Certainly in terms of design, I think the brand has knocked it out of the park. This component looks like no AVR before it. Most obviously, it lacks a display. The solid extruded aluminium chassis has a sculpted twist. Only a volume knob to the right gives the game away.

Build quality is reassuringly substantial. The flimsy top plate so common on many receivers has been replaced by a sturdy roof, distinguished in premium gun-metal grey. The receiver is also relatively compact, standing just 90mm tall. You shouldn't have any problem accommodating it on standard TV furniture.

The rear panel is refreshingly/alarmingly (delete as appropriate) economic. There are four HDMI inputs, and a single ARC-enabled output, all of which are 2.0a spec with HDCP 2.2 support. Additionally, there are just two digital audio inputs (coaxial and optical), plus analogue stereo, 3.5mm minijack, a lone USB and Ethernet LAN. You're hardly spoilt for choice. But with Bluetooth onboard and integrated Wi-Fi, does that really matter?

Typical system configuration might be to use the HDMI inputs for Blu-ray, games consoles and a set-top box,

while the minijack input provides handy access for an Amazon Echo Dot.

While this HEOS amp is forward-thinking, it's not entirely committed to the home cinema cause. What we have here is a bare-bones 5.1 design. There's no Dolby Atmos support – probably because the HEOS speaker ecosystem doesn't support it. This makes that price tag look a bit spicy.

But if you buy into the HAVR (as we'll call it), then you have to buy into the broader topography of HEOS, otherwise the package makes little sense.

While there are speaker terminals for all five channels, the rationale behind this receiver is that only the front soundstage will be wired. HEOS wireless speakers are expected to perform surround duties, with a wireless HEOS subwoofer providing deep bass.

The other central conceit behind the HAVR is that users will setup and manage it using the HEOS app. For everyday control, a simple IR remote is supplied. This offers basic input selection, volume adjustment and track selection.

'In terms of design, Denon has knocked it out of the park, and build quality is reassuringly substantial'

Shifting setup from onscreen menus (of which there are none) to an app heralds a very different user experience. The procedure mirrors the routine normally followed when setting up a multiroom system.

Don't worry, be 'appy

I took the easy first step of connecting the AVR to my network by Ethernet. The app found it immediately. While it's a little counter intuitive to set up an AVR without a traditional onscreen UI (particularly given how friendly the usual Denon setup mode is), the now-and-next instructions are easy to follow.

During installation, the AVR also learns your TV's volume controls, so you can take basic control with a regular doofer. The IR receiver is cleverly hidden in the AVR's front foot.

For this audition, the receiver was partnered with a pair of HEOS 1 speakers at the rear plus the dedicated HEOS subwoofer. During setup, I configured the amp by telling it I would add this trio later. With inputs duly arranged and basic functionality established, I then used the Add Device command to place my three wireless HEOS speakers onto the same network (initially connecting a smartphone via 3.5mm lead to impart the Wi-Fi password). Once I had grouped them with the HAVR, I had a working 5.1 system.

Obviously building all this as intended is a costly affair. The rear HEOS 1s sell for £200 a pop while the HEOS subwoofer is £600. There is a conventional subwoofer output, if you don't need the HEOS option.

Any HEOS speakers can be paired for wireless duties, and they can be either HS1 or HS2 iterations. If you were any early HEOS adopter and have since moved to HS2 (high-res capable) models, delegating your original HS1s for rears could make a lot of sense.

It should be stressed that when the sub and HEOS 1s are grouped with the AVR, they are not on any wider HEOS network. They have a direct 5GHz connection to the amp, with an operational range of around 10m.

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
5.1-channel
multiroom AVR with
wireless surround/
subwoofer support

POSITION:
Separate to Denon's
regular AVRs

PEERS:
Yamaha RX-V483;
Marantz NR1608

1. No display, no inputs – the HEOS front panel looks like no other AVR

2. A small IR remote offers basic controls if you can't use the app





The default when linking all this kit together is to select the 'optimised for HEOS AVR' option, which is how the system was auditioned. Perhaps rather surprisingly, there's no further setup calibration required, nor microphone supplied.

The building blocks of the HAVR come from the Marantz NR slim-line home cinema line. However, I'm told that it's a substantially different beast beneath the lid, which is borne out by a quite different sonic performance.

'The HEOS AVR may be specified at only 50W per channel but there's no shortage of punch on tap'

The receiver offers a variety of listening modes. For the most part, Auto applies whatever processing is appropriate. In addition to Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD MA codecs, there are the usual Pro-Logic and DTS Neo:6 modes, plus multichannel stereo and virtual surround. The app streams Spotify, Deezer, Napster, Soundcloud and TIDAL services. It also provides access to music delivered via USB, or from networked music folders. I found browsing my NAS boxes reassuringly fast.

The app itself is unfussy and efficient. Six Quick Select buttons can be assigned to any of the inputs, and renamed to keep them intuitive to other users.

Starting with stereo

To get a feel for the sonic character of the HAVR, I listened in two-channel first. Hi-res file support includes DSD up to 5.6MHz, plus FLAC 24-bit/192kHz, WAV and ALAC.

I'm Waiting for the Man, in 24-bit FLAC from *Velvet Underground Live*, is no audiophile experience, but the atmospheric is spot on. Lou Reed stands slightly off centre, the rest of the band placed indiscriminately around. It's live and scruffy, and makes your sneakers feel sticky.

Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Snow Maiden Suite* (24-bit/44.1kHz from HD Tracks), is altogether more challenging. The HAVR just about keeps track of chimes and strings, when percussion rolls in.

Like any Denon AVR without Audyssey room correction, it can sound a little plummy. The intervention of the wireless sub is certainly not subtle. Bass, treble and subwoofer levels are all adjustable from the app.

Iron Maiden's *Tears of a Clown*, a FLAC vinyl rip from *Book of Souls*, benefits from the receiver's dynamic reserves. It may be specified at only 50W into 8 ohms, but there's no shortage of punch on tap. Definition is a bit





on the slabby side though. *Oxygene Part IV* (Jean-Michel Jarre, 24-bit FLAC), affords better spatial placement, and plays to the receiver's strengths, principally a defined mid-range.

Daft Punk's *Doin' it Right* (MQA) drops a bassline that's virtually subterranean, oozing from Denon's wireless sub. Style wise, this is as distinctive as the AVR. It shares the same curve on the grille, and can be positioned either horizontally or vertically. One benefit of the wireless connection is that you can place it anywhere for maximum room effect, although this should be moderated by your choice of LCR (I used my DefTech Reference speakers), as you need the soundstage to integrate.

The rear-ported sub uses dual 5.25in woofers, and starts to stir from around 31.5Hz. Crossover frequency is based on application, but appears to be set around 100Hz. Level and phase can be fine tuned on the HEOS app. However, it lacks tightness.

Ultimately, the HEOS is most at home with multichannel movies. *Edge of Tomorrow* (Blu-ray) has magnificent sound design, and really gives this 5.1 system a chance to shine. When reluctant reincarnating hero Tom Cruise first dons his exoskeleton in anger, the beachhead battle is massively exciting. The subwoofer doesn't take much encouragement

SPECIFICATIONS

DOLBY ATMOS: No. Dolby TrueHD **DTS:X:** No. DTS-HD Master Audio **THX:** No
MULTICHANNEL INPUT: No **MULTICHANNEL PRE-OUT:** No **MULTICHANNEL OUTPUT (CLAIMED):** 5 x 50W (into 8 ohms) **MULTIROOM:** Yes. Part of a HEOS setup
AV INPUTS: 2 x digital audio (1 x optical and 1 x coaxial); 3.5mm stereo minijack; stereo phono **HDMI:** Yes, 4 x inputs; 1 x output (v2.0a/HDCP 2.2 on all)
COMPONENT VIDEO: No **VIDEO UPSCALING:** Yes. 2160p **DIMENSIONS:** 434(w) x 90(h) x 277(d) mm **WEIGHT:** 6kg

FEATURES: HEOS wireless speaker support; Apple OS and Android control apps; hi-res audio playback (FLAC, WAV, ALAC, DSD); Ethernet; Wi-Fi; Bluetooth; USB; music service support via app includes Spotify, Tunes, Tidal, Napster, Soundcloud and Deezer; IR remote; ARC on HDMI output

PARTNER WITH



HEOS HS2: If you're looking for the most affordable avenue to wireless surround with the HEOS AVR, you'll need these two-way compact speakers. Priced at £200 each, they can also be used with the HEOS Go-Pack for out-and-about portability.

to make its presence known; when a drop-ship lands on an unfortunate grunt, it booms in delight.

The HEOS 1 is a small speaker by any measure, and struggles to maintain the heft of the soundstage, but they deliver steered effects with suitable gusto. When Cruise's drop-ship takes a hit, metal rends to the rear right. As he falls to the beach, drop-lines whistle in a 360-degree arc.

However, while the HEOS rears seem synced to the action with zero latency, I was aware of occasional pop and futz that seemed to travel to them through the ether.

When Cruise first meets Vrataski (Emily Blunt) in the training room, spinning blades zip left/right and front/back. The soundstage is agreeably immersive, and those little HEOS rears are able to convey metallic heft, thanks to a helping hand from that ever-eager sub.

Ambitious HEOS

A makeover for the AV receiver is long overdue. It remains to be seen if this HEOS flag-waver is a one-shot or trend-setter, but it's undeniably ambitious. However, treating an AVR as a wireless audio component has some unintentional consequences. One of my sources, a Bluesound Vault containing hi-res audio tracks, is also app-controlled. Juggling between apps is a faff.

This isn't a particularly musical-sounding AVR either, but it has no problem delivering enthralling cinema sound, albeit with a few rough edges. The appeal of wireless rears is obvious, particularly if you have wooden floors.

For me though, the real win here is one of design. I'd like to see the same build quality aesthetic (stylized fascia, no display) applied to a regular Dolby Atmos receiver with conventional onscreen GUI. Now that would be intriguing... ■

3. Stripped back connections include single stereo phono input and four-in/one-out HDMI

4. The HEOS AVR joins a product line that first launched in 2014



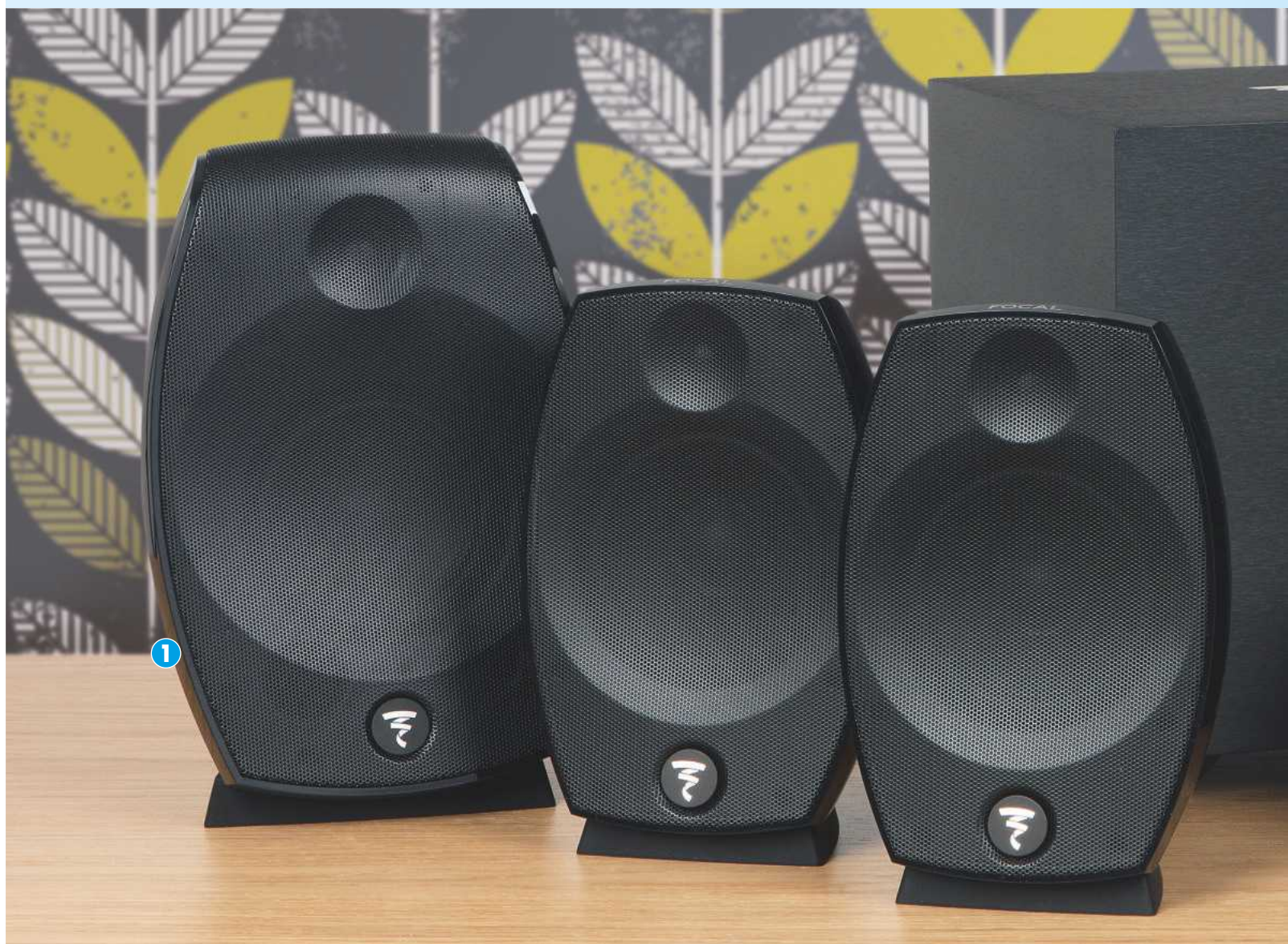
HCC VERDICT



Denon HEOS AVR

→ £800 → www.denon.co.uk

WE SAY: This novel HEOS AVR takes wireless multiroom cinema to another level, and great industrial design makes a virtue of the basic 5.1 configuration.



Mark Craven hopes to get his Dolby Atmos fix from Focal's revamped Sib sub/sat system

Breath of fresh air

Focal's latest speaker pack is such an obvious idea I'm surprised I haven't come across something like it sooner. Take a 5.1 sub/sat system, build in some Dolby-certified upfiring drivers into the L/R speakers, and – as Focal's French design team no doubt said – voila!

The range chosen for this Atmos invention is Focal's Sib – it's long-running smallscale (but not its smallest) cinema series, previously featured in *HCC* more than a decade ago. Sib has now evolved to become Sib Evo. (That name applies to the non-Atmos modules in this six-pack, too – there's a Sib Evo 5.1 system featuring regular speakers).

All five of the satellites feature a 5in midrange driver below a 0.75in soft dome tweeter. The two Atmos units get an additional 3in 'full-range' driver (rated 90Hz-20kHz) set in the top. There's no dedicated centre speaker; you simply take one of the three standard models, release the screw holding in its rubber stand, and use this as a cradle with the speaker positioned horizontally. You can rotate the Focal badge if you want.

That extra driver means the Atmos members of the Evo range have to be a good chunk larger than their counterparts. In fact, they are rather portly, certainly bigger than the likes of KEF's Eggs or B&W's M-1s. I'm not entirely sure I love the design, either. They have curved sides, concave grille and a very slight lean back when



AV INFO

PRODUCT:
5.1.2 Dolby Atmos
sub/sat package

POSITION:
A larger proposition
than Focal's non-
Atmos Dome
sub/sat range

PEERS:
KEF E Series 5.1;
B&W MT-50 5.1

on their plinths, but they don't quite go far enough to look, well, sexy.

Wiring up is bit fiddly, too, as they feature bare-wire terminals that open and shut via a push-button. This clamps your cabling well, but on the Atmos modules both sets are close together.

The subwoofer – the Cub Evo – isn't curved at all. It's just a black MDF-finished box, with downfiring 8.25in woofer, rear control panel, and a front-facing port. Only a status light on the back – sandwiched between crossover and gain dials, phase flip-switch, auto power switch and LFE/stereo phono inputs – lets you know its 200W amp is ready to rumble. A funky, high-gloss Focal logo in the top panel does catch the eye, though.

Making room for more

Installing satellite speakers with Atmos drivers throws up a few issues. External upfiring modules are designed to sit on top of floorstanders, which will typically mean around/just above ear height, or you can place them wherever you want. With the Sib Evo, your Atmos drivers will be wherever you sit the speakers, and this means that if you're the person who has enjoyed the flexibility of smallscale speakers and housed them around a flatscreen TV on an AV unit, they're going to be a bit low down. Happily, two discreet wall-mounts are supplied. Or you could use existing stands (as I did) or invest in Focal's Hip Evo stand.

Focal suggests a 3m distance from speaker to listening position, which is suited to a small-to-mid-sized room.

The system took a bit longer to set up than most sub/sat packs I've played with, because of those Atmos units. As usual, my AVR calibration routine set the Atmos channels too low initially, and I did end up moving the speakers slightly forward from where they'd usually sit. But after a session with Dolby's test disc, I was happy with the rain falling on to my head during the *Amaze* trailer and felt good to go.

These speakers sound good – as they should for the money. There's a steeliness to their presentation, a strong mid-range from those 5in drivers, that brings body to movie soundtracks even when the LFE channel isn't in full-flight. Above this, the tweeters coax out high-frequency details without sounding brittle or flirting with distortion.

They're snappy and quick, too, although not as immediately aggressive or exciting as other home cinema speakers. The emphasis here leans towards mid-range solidity and impact.

This makes them an easy listen. Animated movie *Bolt* (Sky Cinema, Dolby Digital 5.1) is presented as a frisky mix of tight Foley effects, clear dialogue and energetic score. As *Bolt* and Mittens land on the roof of a speeding train, details like a creaking metal ladder or the whoosh of air feel like part of a cohesive whole.

1. The Sib Evo Dolby Atmos system packs seven channels into its five satellites

Bass response is laudable, too. As with the tweeters, the combined weight of the Cub Evo and the 5in drivers doesn't reach the frequency extremes of high-end home theatre, but the woofer works well at boosting the size of the satellites' output without sounding over-bearing. Integration from sub to Sib is excellent.

And when it's called upon to generate real low-end presence, it's happy to oblige. The storm-laden clouds that roll over Everest (*Everest*, Blu-ray) are signalled by a massive, roiling LFE throb that fills the soundstage. It's not so low as to worry your building's foundations, but will easily have you breaking out in a grin.

'These speakers sound good – there's a steeliness to their presentation that brings body to movie soundtracks'

So what of Atmos? *Unbroken* (Blu-ray, Dolby Atmos) gives the Sib Evos plenty of moments to prove their mettle and they largely succeed. The opening dogfight sequence offers buzzing Japanese Zeros and bullet-fire seemingly arriving from all angles, with noticeable info up high. Later in the movie, a storm whips waves and wind through the soundfield as our heroes' dinghy is battered; then the clouds burst with a life-saving downpour that had me inadvertently glancing ceiling-wards.

With another disc (*The Magnificent Seven* remake, Ultra HD Blu-ray), the final shootout in Rose Creek begins with chiming church bells that resonate eerily throughout all the speakers (including those upfirsers). In the following fight, gunfire from a second-floor balcony attacks my listening position from left and above as the camera sweeps upwards.

Is it the most authoritative Atmos experience I've ever heard? No. The Sib Evos' drivers don't have the potency of the larger designs (such as KEF's R50s – £600-per-pair – or PSB's £350-per-pair Imagine XAs), meaning that height detailing can feel less pronounced. But that doesn't take away from the effect they have of expanding a soundmix and delivering on specific imagery. You can discover exactly what they add to the equation

SPECIFICATIONS

Sib Evo Dolby Atmos

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 5in Polyflex midbass; 1 x 0.75in soft dome tweeter; 1 x 3in full-range Dolby Atmos driver **ENCLOSURE:** Rear-ported Dolby Atmos speaker **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 65Hz-25kHz (90Hz-20kHz for Atmos driver) **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 90dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 25W-200W **DIMENSIONS:** 295(h) x 195(w) x 190(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 3.25kg

Sib Evo

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 5in Polyflex midbass; 1 x 0.75in soft dome tweeter **ENCLOSURE:** Rear-ported **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 70Hz-25kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 90dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 25W-200W **DIMENSIONS:** 252(h) x 162(w) x 162(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 1.8kg

Sib Cub Evo (subwoofer)

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 8.25in downfiring Polyflex woofer **ENCLOSURE:** Front-ported **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 35Hz-150Hz **ONBOARD POWER:** 200W **REMOTE CONTROL:** No **DIMENSIONS:** 305(h) x 208(w) x 299(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 8kg **CONNECTIONS:** LFE input; stereo phono input

PARTNER WITH



UNBROKEN (BLU-RAY):

Angelina Jolie directs this true-story WW2 drama which snagged Oscar noms for sound editing and mixing, and its Dolby Atmos mix is inspired, mixing scene-stealing FX panning with subtle atmospherics.

by simply unhooking the speaker wires that feed the Atmos terminals – do this and the soundfield shrinks inwards and that sense of dimensionality diminishes. That extra layer pays dividends.

Surround sound immersion of the more traditional kind is rewarding, with the non-Atmos Sibos working as a quintet to pan effects and push through dialogue. Presentation from each enclosure is direct rather than expansive, however, which works well for localised effects but can leave you sensing a few gaps (those wanting rear back speakers can pick up the regular Sib Evos in a 2.0 package).

With music, therefore, the Focal system's strengths are its rhythm and drive, and even-handedness, but you'll likely want to step up to the brand's audiophile floorstanders for a cavernous, seamless stereo image. I have no qualms about streaming my Spotify library through them, though.

Fun, fun, fun

So this is a welcome innovation from Focal. Dolby Atmos upgraders are provided with an alternative option to in-ceiling installation or matching standalone enclosures with existing gear. Of course, before buying, consider the size of these speakers and where you will install them – there's a little less flexibility here.

Atmos isn't the be-all-and-end-all of Focal's newcomer either. Whether your audio source is 3D or flat, this package will deliver it with control, clarity and a sense of fun. Highly recommended ■

HCC VERDICT



Focal Sib Evo Dolby Atmos 5.1.2

→ £1,100 → www.focal.com/uk

WE SAY: The Evo 5.1.2 is a slick one-box Dolby Atmos solution with a classy sound signature – and might be just what your home cinema has been crying out for.

2. The larger front L/R speakers house Focal's Atmos drivers



"truly spectacular"

says the homeowner of this
4K home cinema with Dolby Atmos 7.2.4



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**MAJOR
EVENT**

Scar-Jo dishes
out Blu-ray justice
in *Ghost in
the Shell*, p96



John Archer enjoys an OLED TV offering beefier picture specs for less money

Philips' OLED v2.0

Philips' debut OLED TV, the 55POS901, was a bit of a belter. It combined OLED's traditional contrast, viewing angle and colour strengths with Philips' powerful video processing and Ambilight technology to impressive effect. The good news is that by doing things a little differently, the brand's new 55POS9002 OLED display is even better...

First impressions of this well-priced 55in model, though, are mixed. Once you've got it screwed onto its remarkably slim open-frame stand it looks very pretty with its thin bezel and metallic feel. What's more, this being a Philips TV you get the added design benefit of Ambilight, which here sees coloured light spilling from the set's left, right and top edges. However, you can't help but notice while attaching the TV to its centrally mounted stand that build quality seems uniquely flimsy for an OLED. The screen doesn't weigh much, there's a lot of plastic tucked away here and there, and that bar-style stand flexes and bends all over the place until you've got it fastened in. Just as well that when it's all screwed together it actually never feels like it's going to wobble or fall over.

Connections include four HDMI (all HDCP 2.2-enabled), three USBs, plus wired and wireless network options. This is par for the premium TV course these days, and it's nice to see Philips not limiting the capabilities of any of the HDMI this time around.

The 55POS9002's remote certainly is not par for the course, thanks to its two-sided approach that places a full QWERTY keyboard on one side, and normal remote buttons on the other.

The handset is a weighty, well-built item, but unfortunately its main navigation zone on the normal side is seriously fiddly to use, resulting in numerous accidental wrong presses. I find it pretty stressful.

The TV's 4K screen supports the HDR 10 and HLG variants of high dynamic range, but not Dolby Vision. And apparently Dolby Vision can't be added via firmware.

While we're on the subject of stuff the 55POS9002 can't do, it also can't play 3D content in the passive or active formats.

So the TV is missing a trick or two, but does carry a couple of significant new ones. First, its Android TV smart system will be joined by Freeview Play, providing the set with access to the catch-up TV services of all the UK's main terrestrial TV broadcasters via a forward/backward electronic programme guide. This will be a nice addition to Android's rigid infrastructure and catch-up shortcomings.

The other key new feature introduced is a 'P5' picture processing engine. This supposedly boasts 25 per cent more power than any previous Philips engine, and melds what used to be three separate chips into a single unit able to deliver no less than 26 separate picture processing features in a new, more logical order. All in the name,

of course, of even better picture quality than the brand has delivered before.

The P5 part of the processor's name comes from the way it tackles five different parts of the picture: motion, contrast, colour, sharpness and adaptation to different sources – including, particularly, HDR material.

A change of tack

Combining this step-up silicon with the latest OLED panel design yields seriously good results; pictures that are not only gorgeous, but which seem to represent a sea change in the way Philips is approaching TV imagery.

The thing is, up to this point Philips has generally had an aggressive attitude when it comes to optimising the performance of the individual elements that go into making a TV or movie picture. Colours have tended to be pushed that much richer and more vibrant than those of any other TV; sharpness levels have been ramped up to look that bit sharper; motion processing

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
55in 4K OLED TV
with Ambilight

POSITION:
Philips' second
OLED TV at the top
of the brand's range

PEERS:
LG OLED55B7;
Sony KD-55A1;
Panasonic 55EZ952

1. Philips has ditched its OLED soundbar for integrated speakers

2. Flip the remote over to use its QWERTY pad



has tried to deliver that bit more fluidity than rivals; contrast has been pushed to ground-breaking extremes... you get the idea.

The 55POS9002's pictures, however, are defined not by their aggression but by their naturalism.

This is particularly evident in the set's approach to black levels. Intensely dark scenes in TV torture test *Arrival* (Ultra HD Blu-ray) don't deliver quite such deep black level depths as one or two rival OLEDs, but do carry a greater sense of refinement and gradation over the subtlest of details in the darkest of corners.

And during these moments there's no sign of the black level 'jumps' you occasionally get with LG's latest OLED TVs – or any noise or vertical banding issues over details in dark areas.

Such stability and detail finesse will please serious movie fans who want to be totally immersed in what they're watching, without having to put up with constant reminders of what a particular TV tech is doing.

Philips' new-found love for naturalism is also clear with the 55POS9002's handling of sharpness and detail. Even

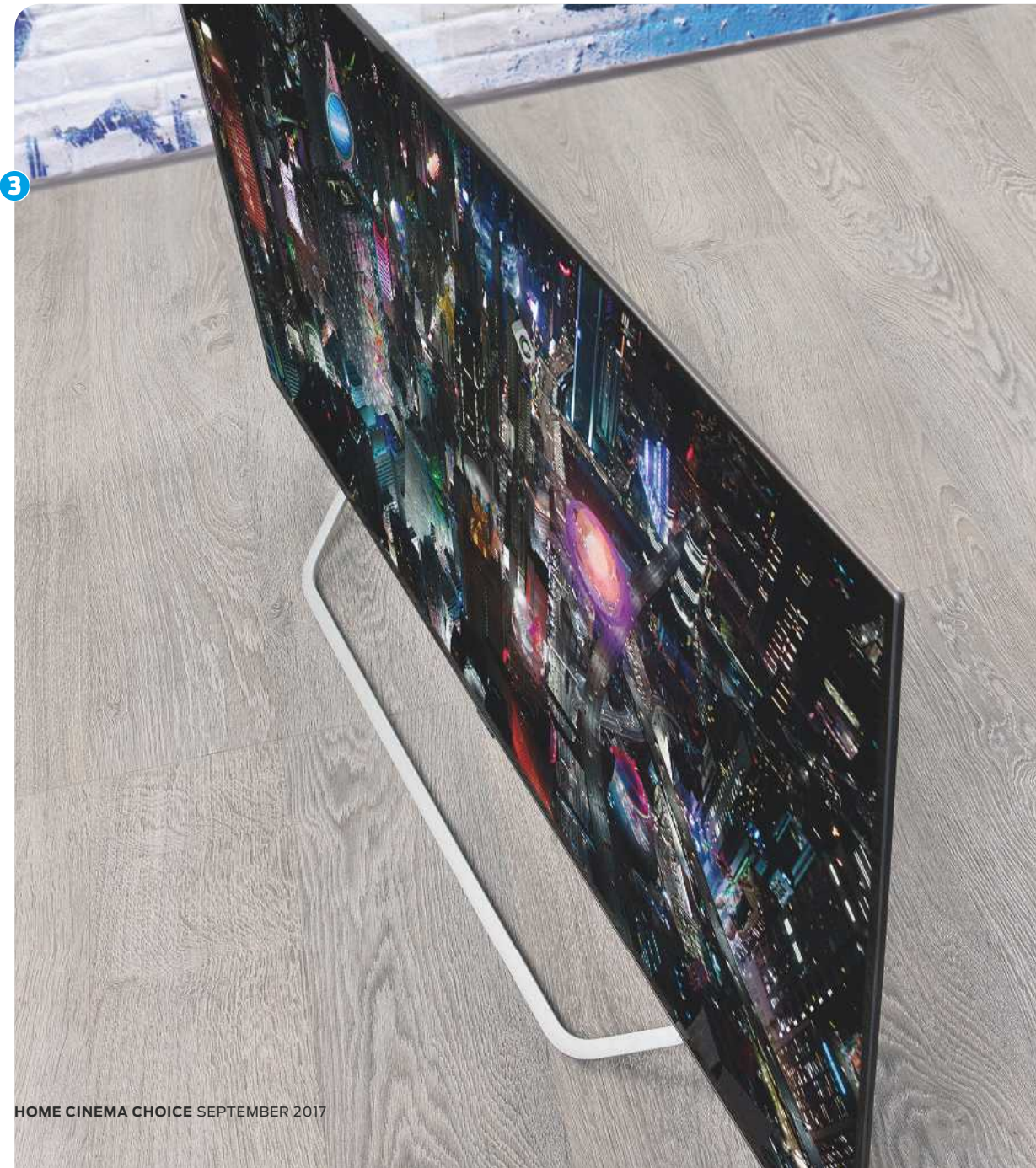
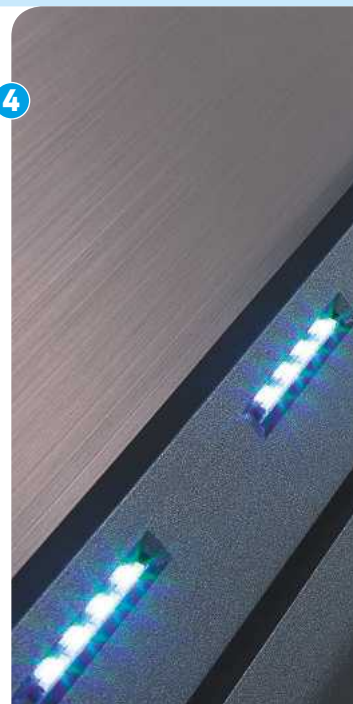
using the default picture settings, with Ultra Resolution processing turned on, there's no sense of over-sharpened grain or edge haloing issues, something associated with past Philips pictures. And the newly combined processing engine upscales HD sources with subtlety.

Pictures still look sharp. The TV paints the 4K details of *Arrival*'s alien and human environments with precision. It's just that it doesn't try to oversell its resolution advantage, only working to give you the maximum impact from the real pixels available in the content.

Then, as noted earlier, there's the 55POS9002's gentler approach to colours. Philips' typical, highly dynamic colour rendering feels more reined in here, not because it has to be due to any technical shortcomings with the OLED panel, but again because the brand seems to have deliberately decided to play things that way. The result is a mixture of natural tones with finessed blends, even during tricky sequences such as those in *Arrival*'s control room and university scenes.

Overall I came away from the 55POS9002 feeling that it was delivering the most consistently immersive and

4



3



natural-looking images I'd seen from a TV outside of Panasonic's more high-end 65EZ1002 [see page 74].

Dampening down dynamism

There are prices to be paid for this naturalistic approach. HDR content from *Arrival* and other Ultra HD Blu-rays isn't as explosively dynamic as you might wish for, particularly compared to LCD TVs, even using the brightest and most satisfying Movie preset (which measured 740 nits on a 10 per cent HDR window). But some will find the slightly constrained feel more than tolerable in return for the set's balance and nuance.

Colours don't have the volumes and intensity they do on some rival OLED and especially LCD models, and some tones looked a bit off using the default colour settings.

'Combining improved silicon with the latest OLED panel yields seriously good results – pictures are gorgeous'

Certainly, I found skin tones looking their best with the colour temperature switched to Normal rather than the default Warm setting you get with the (most useful) HDR Movie mode engaged.

Again, though, the 55POS9002's subtlety, freedom from any marked HDR colour striping, and the consistency of its colour handling across all types of content is a fine pay off for the slightly reduced dynamics.

On the motion front, some of Philips' provided motion processing options – even most of them, really – tend to overcook things as usual. There is a new Movie motion mode, though, that offers a calmer, more considered approach, and which retains a cinematic degree of judder while suffering scarcely any processing side effects. And the TV can easily make everyone look like they're skating on ice, if that's what you really want.

All these examples prove that while Philips may have dialled down the drama for the 55POS9002, it's upped the sense of authenticity. The result is a more consistently engaging image.

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: No **4K:** Yes, 3,840 x 2,160 **HDR:** Yes, HDR 10; HLG **TUNER:** Yes, Freeview HD (Freeview Play) **CONNECTIONS:** 4 x HDMI inputs; 3 x USBs; headphone jack; Ethernet; optical digital audio output **SOUND (CLAIMED):** 30W **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** N/A **CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** N/A **DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 1,230(w) x 715(h) x 4.7(d)mm **WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 16.81kg

FEATURES: Built-in Wi-Fi; USB multimedia playback; DLNA multimedia playback; P5 processing engine; Android TV and Freeview Play smart systems; three-sided Ambilight; triple-ring sound technology; HDCP 2.2 on all HDMI inputs; Perfect Natural Motion; Ultra Resolution; Micro Dimming Premium

PARTNER WITH



SAMSUNG HW-MS650: This single-enclosure soundbar (no subwoofer) still delivers a remarkably deep and controlled bass output, allied to high-fidelity, HDMI switching and a no-nonsense, premium design. Available for around £600.

A final point to make about the set's pictures concerns their measured input lag figure (input lag being the time it takes a TV to deliver image data received at its inputs). This averages out at 35ms across all 4K and 2K inputs, and is very decent for such a processing-intensive TV. It sadly prevents me from feeling able to blame the 55POS9002 for many of my unfortunate *Battlefield 1* online 'incidents'.

A key difference between the new screen and Philips' OLED debut regards its audio. The built-in soundbar of before has been jettisoned; instead the TV uses a so-called 'triple ring' system to deliver more extension from its speakers in conjunction with a large woofer placed at the centre of the rear panel.

This triple ring approach doesn't, though, sound nearly as impactful, detailed or well spread as the previous model's soundbar. It leaves the mid-range and bass elements sounding more muffled. That said, versus typical TV sound systems it's a solid audio effort, especially as there's no ungainly chassis vibration even when you're running it at pretty much maximum volume.

Daring to be different

The OLED space is suddenly awash with screens all vying for your home cinema buck. Manufacturers are therefore having to work harder to find something that makes their wares stand out – so it's handy that Philips has a long history of daring to be different. And not only is this 55in OLED more affordable than most, and carries Philips' usual Ambilight illumination tech, it has a picture performance that makes you sit up and take notice. Philips has surprised me by crafting a movie-watching experience that's less show-boaty but more beautifully immersive than any previous TV from the brand I can think of. Build quality and audio aren't knockouts, but you may not care ■

3. Philips' new P5 processor tackles 26 different image elements

4. Ambilight LEDs adorn the top, left and right edges of the TV's frame

HCC VERDICT



Philips 55POS9002

→ £2,200 → www.philips.co.uk

WE SAY: While the 55POS9002 isn't the showiest OLED TV in town, it's unexpectedly natural and refined pictures, plus affordable price, will win it many AV fans.

AV INFO

PRODUCT:

Affordable DLP
4K HDR projector

POSITION:

Below the bulkier
and 4K-capable
V9800, above
the H7850, also 4K

PEERS:

Epson EH-TW9300;
Optoma UHD65

Acer sets the pace with a compact, competitive UHD HDR projector. **Steve May** counts the pixels

4K cinema goes mainstream

The 4K DLP projector landscape is changing faster than timelapse footage from *Planet Earth*. Just months after the first UHD models landed with all the grace of a beached whale, a new generation of entirely more accommodating models are breaking cover, and with price tags that will make any AV addict sit up and pay attention.

Acer is taking point with the V7850, one of two 2160p models from the brand to adopt a room-friendly form factor. Unlike its UHD predecessor, the V9800, it's small enough (approximately 40cm wide) for a living room or small theatre environment, easily fitting where a hulking 15kg beamer just isn't going to work. With HDR support and a brightness of 2,100 Lumens, could this be a 4K projector for the AV everyman?

Design-wise, the V7850 is certainly on the right side of classy. The gloss white cabinet looks great and the lens assembly has a pleasing copper-coloured wrap. Well ventilated, it routes hot air to the front. Overall build quality seems fine.

The supplied IR remote is a cosmetic match, with bright-blue backlit buttons.

If you want to go hands-on, there's menu based navigation through a selection of controls mounted towards the rear of the PJ's top panel. Connections are found around the back. Of the two HDMI inputs, only one is v2.0/HDCP 2.2-capable (labelled 'UHD 4K'), so you'll probably want to route all your sources through your AV receiver. There's also a VGA input and output, audio minijack, plus Ethernet, RS232 and 12V trigger, the latter useful for partnering the Acer with an electric projection screen.

Bucking the trend, the V7850 is 3D ready, but Acer doesn't bother to bundle glasses.

This single-chip DLP PJ offers HDR 10 support (but no other HDR variants), tied to a REC.709-grade colour wheel. So while the projector is compatible with wide colour, as found on most UHD Blu-rays, it downconverts hues to REC.709.

The Acer is accommodating, but unfancy, when it comes to installation. Focus, zoom and vertical lens-shifting are all done manually. Height can be adjusted between 0 and 15 per cent of the image, enough to overcome most hurdles,

while the zoom ratio is a healthy 1.6x. Combined with Acer's lens, this results in a throw ratio of 1.39-2.22:1. There's no horizontal lens-shift offered.

While the V7850 warrants a proper projection screen, it features a colour compensation mode for those firing directly onto a painted wall.

Like many compact multimedia projectors, the V7850 has in-built speakers, which are thin-sounding but functional. Rated at 2 x 5W, it's probably good enough for impromptu sessions of uncritical viewing, but uncomfortable for anything more.

Dripping in detail

Powered up, the V7850 makes a great first impression, with copious picture detail pinging off the screen. A 4K demo clip authored by Japanese production house Q-Tec looks gorgeous; a shiny kimono has lustre and realistic texture.

Texas Instruments' 4K DLP solution employs hyper-fast mirror switching to create a 4K image from just four million mirrors; the mirrors flip at 9,000 times a second, and the technique is ingenious, certified as 4K by the Consumer Technology Association (CTA).

However, I did note loss of 4K detail (via a test pattern) with Acer's Super Resolution processing activated, artefacts taking the place of high-frequency information. Some tweaking is therefore worthwhile – I ended up putting Super Resolution back in its box by adjusting it to 0, and setting Sharpness to 3. This gave a cleaner, sharper image, although didn't entirely pass my test pattern criteria. To be honest, it's unlikely this will translate to everyday viewing; 4K content still appears better delineated than Full HD. And you may find that you prefer the impact that Super Resolution can deliver when it comes to teasing out fine details. It's a feature worth experimenting with. The simple rule is tweak the image to best suit your source.

1. Acer's backlit remote sits snugly in your hand

2. 1.6x zoom and vertical lens shift aid installation







SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes. Active shutter (glasses optional) **HDR:** Yes. HDR 10 **4K:** Yes. 3,840 x 2,160
CONNECTIONS: 2 x HDMI (1 v2.0; 1 x v1.4); RS232; 12V trigger; Ethernet; PC VGA in/out; minijack audio; USB (device charging) **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 2,100 Lumens
CONTRAST (CLAIMED): 1,000,000:1 **ZOOM:** 1.6x **DIMENSIONS:** 398(w) x 127(h) x 297(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 5.3kg

FEATURES: Single-chip UHD DLP projector with RGBRGB colour wheel; built-in 2 x 5W audio; +/- 15 per cent vertical lens shift; REC.2020 colour mapping; ISF calibration; AcuMotion frame interpolation; Dynamic Black; HDR adjustment; throw ratio of 1.39-2.22:1; MHL compatible; wall colour mode; gamma, brightness, contrast, saturation, tint, colour temperature control; colour management

PARTNER WITH



SKY Q: Acer's V7850 is a perfect foil for Sky's Ultra HD (but SDR) sports broadcasts and movie/TV downloads. Upgrade from Sky+HD to a Sky Q Silver box to sample 4K delights, adding Wi-Fi multiroom Sky Minis. Price depends on contract.

3

Rated at 2,100 Lumens, the V7850 isn't the brightest compact projector out there. It isn't even as bright as its more affordable 4K stablemate, the H7850, which pumps at 3,000 Lumens, but this isn't an issue when viewed in a fully dark room.

Colours are vibrant, and the colour mapping from REC. 2020 sources maintains depth and richness. The level of colour detail evident as Immortan Joe gets dressed early on in *Mad Max: Fury Road* (UHD Blu-ray) is delicious.

While the projector is HDR 10 compatible, it isn't able to deliver the kind of luminance highlights you'll routinely see

'This is a star when it comes to operational noise. Acer's Silent mode is so quiet you can hear popcorn drop'

on an HDR flatscreen. This is to be expected, as the two display technologies are just not comparable. When tone mapping white detail mastered at 1,000 nits, clipping becomes apparent.

As with Acer's 4K debut, the V9800 [HCC #272] the projector's black level performance doesn't exactly inspire in the way that, say, Sony's VPL-HW45ES (Full HD, £2,000) can. Images can sometimes get lost in a sea of featureless grey murk, robbing the picture of its sense of contrast and image depth.

The Dynamic Black function can be used for a contrast boost, but increases the projector's operating noise considerably. This is a shame, as generally, the V7850 is something of a star in this regard. I found quiet movie moments unbothered by the usual whine of a DLP colour wheel, and switch to Acer's Silent mode and it's so quiet you can hear popcorn drop. I'd only therefore recommend the Dynamic Black feature for when it's necessary to combat the effects of ambient light.

As with most modern PJs, the V7850 comes stocked with a wide range of image presets, including Movie, Dark Cinema, Standard, Bright, Rec 709, Game, Sports, User and the aforementioned Silent. It's unlikely you'll ever

want to flit between so many depending on circumstance – stick to Standard, Silent and the two cinematic modes, and adjust them to suit. The usual controls are offered (Contrast, Brightness, Gamma, Colour Temp, etc), plus more advanced options including colour management (the projector is ISF certified).

There's also a sliding HDR tool with parameters of 1-4. Slide it to 4 and peak highlights glow a little brighter than, for example, if it's set to 2. It's quite subtle, and rather highlights the big difference between HDR implementation on PJs and flatscreens. It's not a brightness booster, though, because it doesn't lift black areas.

Away from Ultra HD content, this projector is a solid effort, albeit with the same black level shortcomings. Single-chip DLPs always look super-sharp (no LCD panel trio to align), and this model upscales regular fare with cinematic aplomb. Worries about rainbow effect distractions are mostly unfounded. What I did see was minimal and largely inconsequential. Personal experience can vary, of course.

Less noteworthy is the projector's motion handling. Regardless of image preset, this can be considered average, with some loss of detail and general smudging. And Acer's AcuMotion frame interpolation processing seems to have little positive impact in any of its three modes.

Affordable alternative

The V7850 is the first next-gen 4K DLP projector to provide a genuinely affordable alternative to the big UHD beasts we've seen to date. It has a limited black level and constrained HDR performance, but it delivers a crisp, colour-rich image with HD and UHD, and can run absolutely silently. Do we like it? Yes we do. It could be just the upgrade you're looking for ■

3. One of the Acer's HDMI inputs is v2.0 and HDCP 2.2-ready

HCC VERDICT

★★★★★

Acer V7850

→ £2,700 → www.acer.co.uk

WE SAY: Finally a 4K projector for the rest of us. Limited contrast (and HDR impact) but strong colours, quiet operation and UHD detail make this Acer an appealing option.



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Mark Craven discovers DALI's sonic know-how doesn't suffer when provided by an in-wall cabinet

Phantom delivers a wall of sound

In-wall speakers have obvious appeal. They allow you to claw back carpet space taken up by floorstanders/standmounts, and can fit in easily with a room's chosen décor. For a system that you can hear but can't see, they're manna from heaven. DALI's Phantom S series, however, are a cut above the norm.

The Danish audio brand sells traditionally-sized in-wall (Phantom H) and in-ceiling speakers (the Phantom E range), but the S are a much larger proposition. Read through DALI's literature and the word 'flagship' crops up regularly – the S series is targeted at high-end systems.

The setup reviewed here uses two S-280s for the front left/right channels (£2,500 each); an S-180 (£1,500) as the centre channel; and a pair of S-80s (£1,000 each) on surround duty. LFE comes via DALI's SUB K-14 F subwoofer (£900, not an in-wall option).

The speakers share design traits and driver tech. All are sealed MDF cabinets, with a slim 4.3in profile. DALI says various constructions were analysed to insure materials were thin enough to create the desired internal cabinet volume, but thick enough to eliminate resonance and ensure a solid build. The rear MDF chamber houses the bottom-mounted speaker terminals and 'dogleg' mounting system, while the front baffle is framed by an extruded aluminium lip. Magnetically attached white lacquer grilles are supplied as a likely match for most environments.

For this audition, DALI delivered the five in-wall speakers on portable (but still large) replica wall platforms.

Listening took place at Ideal AV, an authorised DALI dealer based in Normanton, West Yorkshire. Run by cinema obsessive Allan Briscoe, Ideal has two permanent show-rooms, one a traditional home cinema, the other a more multipurpose media space. A Marantz SR7011 AVR drove the array.

As the leaders of the pack, I'll focus first on the S-280 speakers. Clap eyes on them, and you'll realise installing these wouldn't be a simple retrofit of an existing partition wall. Measuring 1.52m high and 52cm wide, in that instance they may require repositioning of existing studs and braces. Fitting into a new-build wall would be much easier.

At the centre of the speaker's front baffle is a hybrid dome/ribbon tweeter,

a DALI mainstay, with the ribbon unit in particular designed to widely disperse high-frequencies. Above and below are a pair of 8in wood/fibre cone (another traditional DALI construction) midbass drivers. These are then flanked by 10in passive woofers, an alternative to porting, which would be a tricky option in an in-wall enclosure. The result is a full-range speaker claiming a frequency response down to around 48Hz.

The S-180 features a single 8in midbass driver and 10in passive woofer. The smallest speaker, the S-80, drops the latter.

Up close, the Phantoms exhibit a premium finish and premium craftsmanship, which is reassuring considering where they will be installed.

Impossibly immersive

The system immediately makes a good impression with the key sequence from tsunami drama *Impossible* (Blu-ray). As Naomi Watts' holiday idyll is swamped by a wall of water, the S-280/S-180 front soundstage has the same effect, creating a massive wave of high-resolution sonics and practically splattering my seat with sea water. The build up to the tsunami is marked by incidental details – a boy chasing his ball, birds singing in the trees – that fill out from the surrounds, creating a wraparound image. >

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Premium in-wall
5.1 speaker system

POSITION:
DALI's priciest
Phantom models,
above H and E
ranges

PEERS:
Artcoustic Spitfire SL;
Sonance LCR2;



1. DALI's tweeter can be rotated 90 degrees, allowing any Phantom speaker to work as a centre enclosure

2



The sound is spacious and ever-so crisp. Cracking branches snap with real bite from DALI's bespoke tweeter array, and placement of effects is impressive, with a sense of vertical expansion as well as width.

The SUB K-14 F is, in terms of form, the odd one out in this package. And in comparison to the rest of the array – particularly the mighty S-280s – it seems a little shy, despite its 14in driver and 500W power plant. It has the grunt, depth and speed to noticeably underpin *Impossible's* tidal wave sequence, but lacks the sheer low-end reach and scale necessary to complement the soaring efforts elsewhere. On the positive side, it is hardly expensive.

The opening chapters of *Gravity* (Blu-ray) again show off the Phantom system's strengths. Chit-chat between Sandra Bullock and George Clooney sweeps distinctly across the LCR from right to left, then, as the space station is caught in the debris storm and the action swirls around, there's a fluid sense of movement from front-to-back. Nuances in the mix, such as the distinct, claustrophobic nature of the inside-a-space-helmet audio are well-preserved. It's the same with the underground shootout in *Sicario* (Blu-ray). The acoustics of the different spaces are obvious, and gunfire is delivered with both punch and clarity. And it's a dynamic listen, too, with plenty of room between the quietest details and loudest moments.

During listening, I found myself harking back to an audition of DALI's top-end Epicon floorstanding system. Hard to compare listening experiences years apart, but I'd suggest the Epicons have a slighter warmer, fuller tone, whether it's a deliberate voicing or the result of different drivers and more voluminous cabinet construction. The Phantoms appear a little more neutral.

I want my MTV...

Running the S-280s both on their own or in a 2.1 setup for music is a hoot. Classic Dire Straits track *Money for Nothing* (*Brothers in Arms*, via Tidal) rejoices in that expansive front soundstage, inviting you to mime along to the drum fills. And the detail of the guitar riff is exquisite – unearthing the delicate harmonic tricks of Knopfler's playing in a way that lower-resolution systems don't. I'd worried that the wide dispersion drivers might muddy stereo imaging, but in truth I never felt that the image wasn't sweetly locked in.

London Grammar's *Hey Now* is an effortless listen, with well-defined percussion and nuanced vocals, while the hypnotic multi-layered strings of Max Richter's *On The Nature of Daylight* (used in *Arrival* but not on the *Original Motion Picture Soundtrack* CD) build and weave through the

SPECIFICATIONS

S-280

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x hybrid dome (1in)/ribbon tweeter; 2 x 8in wood fibre cone midbass drivers; 2 x 10in passive woofers **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed (with auxiliary bass radiator); in-wall **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 48Hz-25kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 89dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 40W-400W **DIMENSIONS:** 1,527(h) x 527(w) x 110(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 35kg

S-180

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x hybrid dome (1in)/ribbon tweeter; 1 x 8in wood fibre cone midbass driver; 1 x 10in passive woofer **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed (with auxiliary bass radiator); in-wall **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 49Hz-25kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 89dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 40W-200W **DIMENSIONS:** 898(h) x 453(w) x 110(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 18.5kg

S-80

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x hybrid dome (1in)/ribbon tweeter; 1 x 8in wood fibre cone midbass driver **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed; in-wall **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 59Hz-25kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 88dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 40W-200W **DIMENSIONS:** 648(h) x 403(w) x 110(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 13.5kg

SUB K-14 F (subwoofer)

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 14in aluminium long-stroke woofer **ENCLOSURE:** Bass reflex **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 29Hz-160Hz **ONBOARD POWER:** 500W **REMOTE CONTROL:** No **DIMENSIONS:** 429(h) x 396(w) x 428(d) **WEIGHT:** 26.4kg **CONNECTIONS:** LFE input; stereo phono input

PARTNER WITH



LG OLED65E7V: This 65in OLED 4K HDR TV (£4,500) isn't entirely super-thin (it bulges a bit around its bottom edge), but mounted on-wall it will maintain the sleek look of a cinema setup with DALI's stealthy Phantom speakers.

left/right speakers, violins quivering, fulsome bass swelling below. Yet cue up something a little more rough and ready (Enslaved's metal opus *Thoughts Like Hammers*, for instance) and the drop in quality is tangible – these speakers can show up the limitations in source material. Back with movies, the 5.1 TrueHD mix for *Rambo* (Blu-ray, 2008) sounds less cohesive than some of its more efficiently mastered counterparts which give the DALIs the fine details and sheer fidelity they crave. And, again, *Rambo's*, erm, Big Gun (I'm not a military expert), while cutting through the action with wallop, probably deserves more aggression and slam from the SUB K-14 F.

Dynamic DALIs

The Phantoms are a remarkable innovation from DALI – in-wall enclosures that manage to sound as large, as dynamic and as well-defined in imaging terms as traditional models. Crisp and articulate, but with a keen bass response, they have the prowess to grace a well-to-do AV room. The S-280s are very big, however, and you might want to partner the Phantoms with a more high-end sub... ■

HCC VERDICT



DALI Phantom S 5.1

→ £9,500 → www.dali-speakers.com.uk

WE SAY: For a near-invisible, premium AV install, these need to be on your shopping list. Astonishing clarity and scale from speakers that are built to last.

2. This 8in midbass driver was built for the Phantom range, with a flat-as-possible magnet to maintain the speakers' low profiles

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AV INFO

PRODUCT:

Mid-range 55in 4K LED LCD TV with Dolby Vision HDR

POSITION:

Near the top of LG's LED LCD range

PEERS:

Samsung UE55MU9000; Sony KD-55XE9005

1. LG's Nano Cell tech aims to boost colour performance off-axis

2. HDMI inputs are split between side- and rear-facing



SCOTCH BROTH

T2: *Trainspotting* whets our appetite in 4K HDR, p105

Bargain-hunters are advised to check out LG's well-featured 55in smartscreen, suggests **Mark Craven**

Shining a light on Dolby Vision HDR

We all have our dream AV setups. High-end systems put together after a minor lottery win matching flagship flatscreen to potent sonics and a crate of Cristal. In the real world, however, these dreams are rarely realised. The hot market for TVs isn't the 65in premium sets. It's nearer where this set from LG operates.

The 55SJ850V ticks nearly all the boxes yet costs a mere (in the scheme of things) £1,300. Spend that, and you get a 55in edge-lit 4K LED model, with HDR support including HLG and Dolby Vision, smart tricks including Freeview Play, third-party audio from Harman/Kardon and a neat solution for your living room.

Of course, now that super-thin bezels are the norm, there's only so much that can be done with TV design. LG's screen maximises the impact of its 55in panel by framing it with a sliver of black, which gives way to a silver finish when viewed side on. This in turn segues into a mottled, white plastic rear cover, which is kind of striking but likely to remain unseen once the set is installed. The metal desktop

stand is crescent-shaped and hefty. It slots into the TV's rear, the joining section hidden by a white plastic cover.

The TV's body expands at its bottom, to incorporate the set's down-firing speakers. The 2.2-channel array is surprisingly effective, a cut above other mid-price models. The orchestral soundtrack of *The Great Wall* (Ultra HD



Blu-ray) gets a bassy, deep feeling, and good detail retrieval. It's not particularly expansive, and a Surround option is more notable for thinning out the audio, rather than adding any sense of immersion.

Of two further sound tweaks to investigate, LG's Magic Sound tuning analyses your room's characteristics and then throws up an improvement. Except, having obediently gone through the setup process, and compared the before-and-after results, I discerned no real difference. A Smart Sound option is more rewarding. Claiming to adjust sound output based on 'content type', it proved effective at ramping up audio characteristics – the echoey temple chambers in *The Great Wall*, for instance.

All this user adjustment is done via LG's webOS, with its friendly fonts, pink tones and magic remote cursor which is an infuriating way to drive around a menu. Stick to the handset's navigation keys for greater control.

Freeview Play is integrated, meaning easy access to the four big UK catchup portals from the pop-up icon bar, in addition to Netflix and Amazon. Other worthwhile apps to download include UK TV Play, Deezer, YouTube Kids, TVCast, Google Play Movies, Now TV and Wuaki TV.

One niggle of the IR remote is that the Voice control button is positioned exactly where you'd expect the 'Enter/OK' key. The result is lots of inadvertent opening of the Voice search tool, which proves to be hit and miss. Seven attempts to open the ITV Hub? I'll stick to buttons, thanks.

Crisp picture

Lace up a 4K BD deck to any of the LG's four HDCP 2.2-enabled HDMI inputs and you're rewarded with a crisp, inviting picture – provided you follow a few ground rules.

First, motion handling is not this TV's strong point, and the situation isn't helped by TruMotion processing being in



play with so many of the presets. When viewing 4K HDR discs, the HDR Vivid option sets TruMotion to Smooth, HDR Standard sets it to Clear, as does HDR Cinema Home. As a preset, Cinema is favourable in this regard, as TruMotion is deactivated (although it still defaults to Edge Enhancement 'on' in the Expert Controls setting).

With *The Great Wall* unboosted motion is average when the going gets tough. In the film's opening chapter, as Matt Damon and pals sweep through a desert valley on horseback, the image is marked by blur and a reduction in perceivable detail. Select from any of the TruMotion settings and you get an exaggerated smoothness that I found quite distracting – an uncinematic.

When there are less fast-moving objects and swift tracking shots, native 4K sharpness is there for all to see. ➤



The Great Wall's rich costume textures and set design showcase plenty of pixel finery and nuance. Damon's straggly hair and weather-beaten skin are carried well. Swap over to the 1080p Blu-ray, though, and upscaled images lose some of that natural look, with edge enhancement and processing noise coming into play – even with the Super Resolution feature off and Noise Reduction features employed (MPEG NR is effective, it must be said, at erasing minute details in favour of a smoother image).

LG makes a big play on the viewing angle strengths of its IPS panel design, and it's somewhat in evidence here. You can drift a long way off-axis and still have a relatively

'The Great Wall's rich costume textures and set design showcase plenty of 4K pixel finery and nuance'

unsullied picture. Contrast does drop off, as the machinations of the edge LED array become more noticeable, but it doesn't have the same paling effect as witnessed on other panels.

How the TV handles its LED illumination causes the most disappointment. Viewed in daylight or with some other light sources in play, the edge LED array seems stable – backlight clouding and rogue splotches are seldom seen. The sequence in *Fast & Furious 7*, where Deckard Shaw sits in the dark in Agent Hobbs' office, features one-half of the screen in blackness, the other half with Jason Statham's facial features looming from the murk. The LG lit this shot well, with black bars retaining depth and solidity. Black levels in general are good, too. Yet switch to dark-room viewing and clouding becomes much more apparent. The bars top and bottom show tell-tale signs of light pollution, and the workings of LG's local dimming is obvious. The latter is adjustable (off, low, medium, high) and how you run this will be personal taste. Having it on its highest setting helps delineate bright objects from their backgrounds and boosts contrast – off leaves the image a little flatter, but you're somewhat less

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: No **4K:** Yes. 3,840 x 2,160 **HDR:** Yes. HDR 10; Dolby Vision; HLG **TUNER:** Yes. Freeview HD (Freeview Play); satellite **CONNECTIONS:** 4 x HDMI inputs; 3 x USB; 2 x RF inputs; Ethernet port; optical audio output; headphone output **SOUND (CLAIMED):** 40W (2.2-channel) **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 1,000 nits **CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** N/A **DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 1,229(w) x 708(h) x 59(d)mm **WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 18.1kg

FEATURES: USB/DLNA multimedia playback; HDR Effect upscaling; webOS 3.5 operating system; voice control; Nano Cell colour technology; edge LED lighting with local dimming; TruMotion processing; Dynamic Contrast; Magic Sound

PARTNER WITH



LG UP970: Combine LG's flatscreen with its debut – and affordable – Ultra HD Blu-ray player. Available for around £270, this is also Dolby Vision-enabled, and integrates with other LG MusicFlow multiroom components.

likely to be bothered by light blooming. Dynamic Contrast is another tool that you'll want to experiment with, but even after much tweaking (and reducing the Brightness setting), I still ended up with the picture feeling flat and washed-out on occasion. This is a TV that does its best work with a level of ambient light in the room.

Where the Korean corp really wants the SJ850V to sell itself is with colour. LG's new Nano Cell technology is billed as a Samsung QLED beater, albeit using a slightly more traditional colour filter/nano particle composition.

Colours enjoy a wide range and plenty of smooth blends. When Gru address the assembled Minions in *Despicable Me* (Dolby Vision Blu-ray), the image feels subtle and cinematic. The diffuse red glow of overhead lighting shows plenty of variation in shade, as does the punchier yellow of the Minions', erm, flesh – while brighter lights reflect succinctly off their heads and goggles.

The impact of the 55SJ850V's colour palette is hampered by a lack of the sort of brightness that makes such HDR content sing. LG claims a peak brightness of 1,000 nits for the SJ850V, a step-up over its OLED sets, but not reaching the peaks of high-end LED models such as Samsung's QLEDs or Sony's ZD9. That said, the luridly coloured cars and warm oranges of *Fast & Furious 7's* Abu Dhabi sequence, and (more noticeably) the vivid swathes of blue, red and purple in *The Great Wall's* Chinese army stand out well. And a rain of flaming arrows in the Damon flick is crisp and vivid, a real HDR highlight.

Be tempted

The SJ850V is a tempting option for a mid-range setup – Dolby Vision HDR, superior smart content and a sensible price go a long way to making some of its image quality foibles easier to bear. In a lit room it rarely disappoints. Just be wary of viewing HDR in cinema-style darkness ■

3. LG's LCD TV claims a peak brightness of 1,000 nits

HCC VERDICT



LG 55SJ850V

→ £1,300 → www.lg.com/uk

WE SAY: Lowering the price point for Dolby Vision disc playback, this 55-inch is mainly impressive, although motion and dark-scene handling aren't immaculate.



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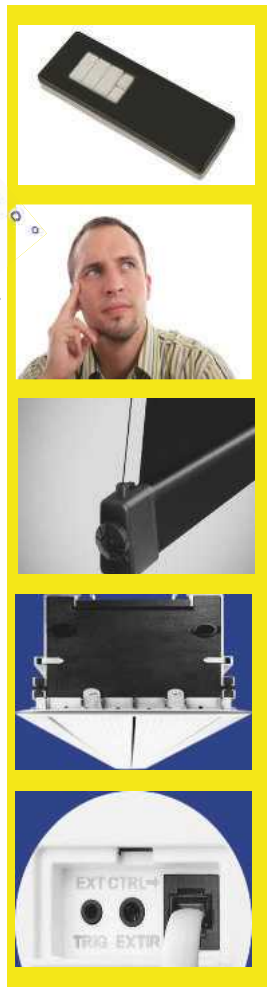
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Full HD PJ that's flexible to a fault?

Impressively for its price, this Vivitek projector offers multiple lens options. But **John Archer** finds compromises elsewhere

IT'S FAIR TO say that Vivitek's H5098 DLP projector doesn't exactly follow the herd.

For starters, extremely unusually for a projector at this price point, it can be bought with any of four lens options (at an additional cost) depending on the size and layout of your room. The standard lens delivers a 1.54-1.93:1 throw ratio, but you can also get it fitted with a Wide Fix lens (throw ratio 0.78:1), a Wide Zoom lens (throw ratio 1.10-1.30:1), plus two Long Zoom options (delivering throw ratios of 1.93-2.89:1 and 3.0-5.0:1). Measure up your room and screen and specify accordingly.

Yet the H5098 is also unusual in today's £2,000-plus projector price bracket for only providing Full HD resolution and standard dynamic range playback. There are now a number of projectors on the market that offer both 4K and/or HDR support, some for not huge amounts more than the asking price here (such as Acer's V7850, reviewed on p52).

By no means all of these more forward-thinking projectors deliver on their 4K/HDR promise particularly brilliantly, so there's certainly still space in the 'step-up'

projector market for a serious HD model – provided it delivers a genuinely premium image.

The H5098 cuts a passable rather than truly handsome figure on your coffee table or ceiling. Its black finish looks and feels a touch plasticky for a £2,600 component, but some artfully curved corners and angled sides stop it from being just another member of the boring AV rectangle club.

Connections include two HDMI's (one with MHL support); a PC VGA port; a 12V trigger output and RS-232 port to aid system integration; and two blasts from the past: composite and component video inputs. Hopefully these latter two ports and the lack of 4K and HDR are the only slightly dated things about the H5098.

Setting up the projector is a doddle. Simple wheels under a pop-up cover on the projector's upper edge provide vertical and horizontal optical image shifting and, depending on which lens option you've gone for, there's a healthy amount of manual zoom to help you get the picture framed on your screen. Heading into the onscreen menus via the chunky backlit remote control uncovers a limited set

AV INFO

PRODUCT:

Single-chip DLP home cinema projector with Full HD resolution

POSITION:

One of Vivitek's pricier Full HD home cinema projectors

PEERS:

Epson EH-TW7300; Acer V7850

of picture presets (though the Movie and Game ones will likely be enough for most *HCC* readers), along with a range of gamma and colour temperature presets and a colour management system.

Vivitek additionally provides a proprietary processing engine enabling you to boost the brightness peaks, adjust flesh tones and call in motion interpolation. I personally didn't find that any of these tools really added much to the viewing experience.

Going ape in HD

Unleashed on the Blu-ray of Peter Jackson's *King Kong*, the H5098 proves a rather frustrating watch thanks to the way it mixes some great qualities with two or three more average ones.

It was actually two of the less impressive traits that initially caught my eye. First, black levels during dark scenes aren't as profound as I would have liked from a £2,600 projector that's been expressly designed for the home cinema market. The night-time scenes on both Skull Island and the streets of New York betray quite a bit of greyness hanging over their darkest corners.

Subtle shading detail is often absent in the darkest parts of the image too, leaving such areas looking hollow. This problem even affects Kong's black CGI fur at times, denying you the chance to marvel at the detail of Weta's special effects and leaving him sometimes looking a bit, well, bald. Just don't tell him I said so.

I also fairly quickly became aware of the H5098 of rainbowing – the common single-chip DLP issue where stripes of red, green and blue can flit over bright parts of the image. To be fair, the rainbowing only occurs for the most

'Even the densest of images reveals their hi-def details without a hint of moire noise or forced edging'

part where small, thin bright image elements stand out against very dark backgrounds. But it's quite aggressive when it appears, and you sometimes feel aware of a subtler but more widespread incarnation of it during detailed mid-bright scenes, too.

The other issue is arguably not really a fair one, but I'll raise it anyway: the Full HD picture inevitably doesn't look as sharp and detailed as the pseudo 4K and even native 4K images some rival projectors are now offering in the £2,000-£3,000 price bracket.

Having said that, the H5098 does about as well with detail and clarity (except in dark areas) as could realistically be expected within the confines of its Full HD pixel count. The flora and fauna of Skull Island looks dense and over-powering, just as it should, while close-ups are crisp enough to reveal the tiny clothing and facial subtleties that help you feel closer – literally – to King Kong's unusually well-rounded characters.

It's good to see, too, that even the densest of environments, such as the fallen tree bridge outside Kong's lair, reveal their HD details without a hint of moire noise, grain or forced edging. This helps pictures seem solid, believable, and more three dimensional. (I can't, sadly, comment on the projector's actual 3D capabilities, as Vivitek didn't supply any compatible glasses for review.)

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes. Active **4K:** No. 1,920 x 1,080 resolution **HDR:** No **CONNECTIONS:** 2 x HDMI inputs; component video; composite video; USB for service; RS-232; 12V trigger port; D-Sub VGA port **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 2,000 Lumens **CONTRAST (CLAIMED):** 50,000:1 **Zoom:** 1.25x (standard lens) **DIMENSIONS:** 432(w) x 181(h) x 345(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 9.3kg

FEATURES: Five lens options available (Wide Fix to Long Zoom); single-chip DLP projector; 3,500-hour lamp life in Eco mode; movie, game, presentation and bright picture presets; 1.54-1.93:1 throw ratio with standard lens; Vivitek motion, flesh tone and peak brightness enhancement processing; vertical and horizontal optical image shifting; keystone correction; 27dB operating noise claimed in Eco mode

PARTNER WITH



VIVITEK WIDE ZOOM LENS:

With a throw ratio that begins at just 1.1:1, this lens option (£1,100 approx) is ideal for when a large image is desired from a relatively short distance. A 1.18x manual zoom extends throw ratio to 1.3:1.

The H5098's sense of detailing is greatly enhanced by a beautifully deft colour touch. The finest of tonal differences are perfectly delineated (apart from, again, where detailing is lost in dark areas), creating just the sort of natural, authentic-looking palette serious video enthusiasts love. Even the largescale SFX shots of first New York and then the jungles of Skull Island look entirely credible, avoiding the slightly green and/or orange 'push' these shots can be imbued with on less well-tuned TVs and projectors.

The PJ handles motion from 24p movie sources with authority, avoiding both unnecessary judder and any fizzing over skin tones.

Finally, the H5098's 2,000 Lumens proves enough to deliver punchy images in a dark room and surprisingly watchable images in a slightly lit room – though I should add that it's not as bright as some of the latest, similarly priced projectors that have been designed to take on HDR.

Alongside the H5098's hit-and-miss movie performance is a hit-and-miss gaming performance. *Battlefield 1*'s crisp, detailed visuals look suitably sharp and rich, but a sense that I was dying even more often than usual was confirmed by an input lag measurement of 100ms. This is way too high for really competitive gaming – and, oddly, I measured the same figure regardless of whether I used the Game picture preset or the Movie one.

The H5098's unexpected lens options do imbue it with some extra appeal. Unless one of those options particularly suits your room requirements, however, I don't think the H5098's performance will be quite compelling enough to tempt cinephiles away from one of the new generation of projectors – either native or upscaled 4K, some with HDR – that are now starting to arrive ■

1. The Full HD H5098 will be joined by native 4K DLP models later this year

HCC VERDICT



Vivitek H5098

→ £2,600 → www.vivitek.eu

WE SAY: Twelve months ago the H5098 would have seemed an attractive proposition, but as the market welcomes similarly priced 4K and HDR projectors it feels slightly off the pace.

Towers + power

Looking for a slightly more tuneful alternative to a soundbar? Steljes Audio might have just the thing, says **Ed Selley**

ADDING AN EXTERNAL speaker to any new television purchase has almost become a default these days. Those lovely slim bezels look splendid but don't afford much space for serious drivers. The 'go to' solution is to add a soundbar – indeed, a number of higher-spec sets are supplied with them. But even if such a TV sounds large and dynamic, any soundbar can be a little bit lacking when it comes to music and effective imaging. Stereo speakers are more effective... but generally require more hardware to make them work.

Enter the Steljes Audio NS6. This is a pair of floorstanding speakers that's entirely self-contained. While not a truly active offering, as one tower contains an amplifier and input board and then outputs this signal to its completely passive partner, this does mean you'll only need a single mains cable to power them.

There's a useful selection of inputs, too. You get one coaxial and optical digital audio apiece, plus a phono line input, 3.5mm input, Bluetooth and a USB-A hookup for charging devices. All of this functionality is controlled via a supplied remote.

This connectivity is then made available to Steljes' pair of 2.5-way floorstanders via a 60W amplifier. The drivers are conventional enough – a 1in soft dome tweeter and brace of 5in midbass drivers finished in a slightly odd copper colour. A front bass port means they can be sited close to a wall, and a detachable plinth is bundled to help with the stability and appearance. A bamboo finish is



The speakers' midbass units are 5in designs

standard (pictured) but a selection of high-gloss colours are also available. The NS6 isn't the most striking-looking bit of audio gear I've ever clapped eyes on, and they do feel a little lightweight, but they look smart enough in an unobtrusive way.

'I am one with the Force'

Connected to a Cambridge Audio 752BD Blu-ray player via coaxial audio input, these speakers sound pretty impressive for the sensible asking price. They manage to disentangle the chaotic Jedha streetfight in *Rogue One* (Blu-ray) with plenty of low-end shove and impact to the explosions, while at the same time keeping dialogue clear and easy to follow. There's no form of virtual surround

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 1in soft dome tweeter, 2 x 5in midbass drivers **ENCLOSURE:** Front-ported **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 50Hz-20kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 87dB **ONBOARD POWER:** 60W **DIMENSIONS:** 168(w) x 900(h) x 260(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 7.5kg each

FEATURES: Active speakers; remote control; Bluetooth; USB device charging; optical digital audio input; coaxial digital audio input; 3.5mm input; analogue phono input; subwoofer output

processing, of course, but provided you install them with a bit of width, the stereo soundstage is usefully immersive. And this was no less apparent with the Season 7 opener of *Game of Thrones* (Sky Atlantic, via optical), where I very quickly 'dialed in' to the soundstage being in front rather than around me. They continue to sound clear and informative at low volumes, and it was only when I pushed that onboard amplifier very hard did the sound signature become in any way harsh.

Where this system really shines though is with music. Using the 752BD as a UPnP player and feeding the NS6 a library of material – up to and including 24-bit/96kHz – it reveals itself to be a very capable mid-priced performer. The way it goes about reproducing Public Service Broadcasting's *Progress* is open, detailed and believable. Tracyanne Campbell's vocals are clear, but have a very pleasing sweetness to them at the same time. Being extremely critical, the bass extension available here isn't huge – they sound reasonably fast and cohesive but there isn't much in the way of bass you can feel. Steljes has equipped the speakers with a subwoofer output, though, so more low-end is potentially available.

Pimp your TV

Away from 5.1, I suspect most people will be seeking a single-enclosure audio upgrade for their TV rather than two traditionally-styled floorstanders. But there's little argument that Steljes' NS6 offers high performance for £450. The range of connections is useful, and they help create a wide image with TV and dig well into music. You could easily pimp a second-room screen with these ■

HCC VERDICT



Steljes Audio NS6

→ £450 → www.steljesaudio.co.uk

WE SAY: The NS6 makes for an entertaining and musically accomplished – if somewhat unusual – alternative to a soundbar.



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Mark Craven HCC March 2017



SB16 Ultra



PB16 Ultra

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The best of the best...

John Archer goes shopping for a premium largescreen TV, returns with a trio of OLEDs and a mammoth LED/LCD, and lets battle commence



DEIFIC DRAMA

Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* lands on UK Blu-ray, p99

LG SIGNATURE OLED65W7

Hang it on the wall and enjoy Dolby Atmos audio...

LOEWE BILD 7.65

The German brand joins the OLED arena in style

PANASONIC TX-65EZ1002

This OLED tempts with its pro-grade ethos

SONY KD-75XE9405

Bigger than its OLED rivals, but is this LCD TV better?

LG OLED65W7

This 65in thinscreen boasts an unusual sonic solution and upgraded OLED imagery



IF WE WERE judging the TVs in this group test on design alone, we could just declare the OLED65W7 the winner and head home early.

Dubbed the 'Wallpaper TV', it's a 65in OLED screen so mind-meltingly thin that you can actually gently bend it, and when you've hung it on your wall (via magnets) it looks more like a window than a telly.

Obviously a screen that's 'barely there' doesn't have room for such mundane things as video processing, panel drivers, connections and speakers. So all those things – including decoding of HLG and Dolby Vision high dynamic range formats alongside the industry standard HDR 10 system – are provided in a hefty external control unit that can be wall-mounted or placed on furniture under the screen. This control unit also contains a speaker system capable of decoding Dolby Atmos bitstreams (only from video streams, not external devices such as 4K Blu-ray players, oddly) into a 4.2-channel config. Two upfiring speakers rise out of the unit's bodywork when you switch the TV on.

Black magic

The TV's picture quality is stunning. The screen's incredible thinness seems to enhance the image's gorgeous depth and solidity, and the design hasn't impacted the ability of LG's OLED panel to deliver amazing black

levels either. As cars battle on the road in *The Fate Of The Furious* (Ultra HD Blu-ray), the night-time backdrop looks almost perfectly dark, with no hint of greyness.

A real picture quality party trick, though, is the way this LG combines trademark deep OLED blacks with more brightness than previous generations have delivered. This transforms the set's delivery of HDR visuals. Bright scenes like *F&F 8*'s opening in Cuba seem much more vibrant and 'real world'; the bright peaks of the sun gleaming on gorgeous cars contain more detail; and the whole image appears more balanced in luminance terms.

This combination of increased brightness and rich blacks gives colours an extra dose of impact over previous OLED sets.

The OLED65W7's pixel-level light control sells its native 4K resolution well, and it's also a better HD upscaler than last year's models.

Sound from that external control unit is excellent, combining power, detail and clarity with good bass extension and a genuine sense of vertical scale. It undeniably outguns the audio of pretty much any other TV.

There are issues with this LG range-topper, however. I found it tricky to get just the right level of brightness out of it; using the Standard preset gives what feels like a correct luminance for HDR, but can cause noise in dark areas. The Cinema preset removes the

noise, but reduces brightness more than I felt comfortable with. And I couldn't find a custom brightness setting that solved both problems.

Secondly, dark Dolby Vision scenes sometimes display marked reductions in the picture's usually phenomenal black levels.

A third issue is motion handling that's not entirely effective at removing judder without causing some unwanted side effects.

Lastly, you can essentially get the same image quality from LG's more affordable E7, C7 and B7 series. The W7 is only really worth its money if you can't resist its wallpaper design.

SPECIFICATIONS

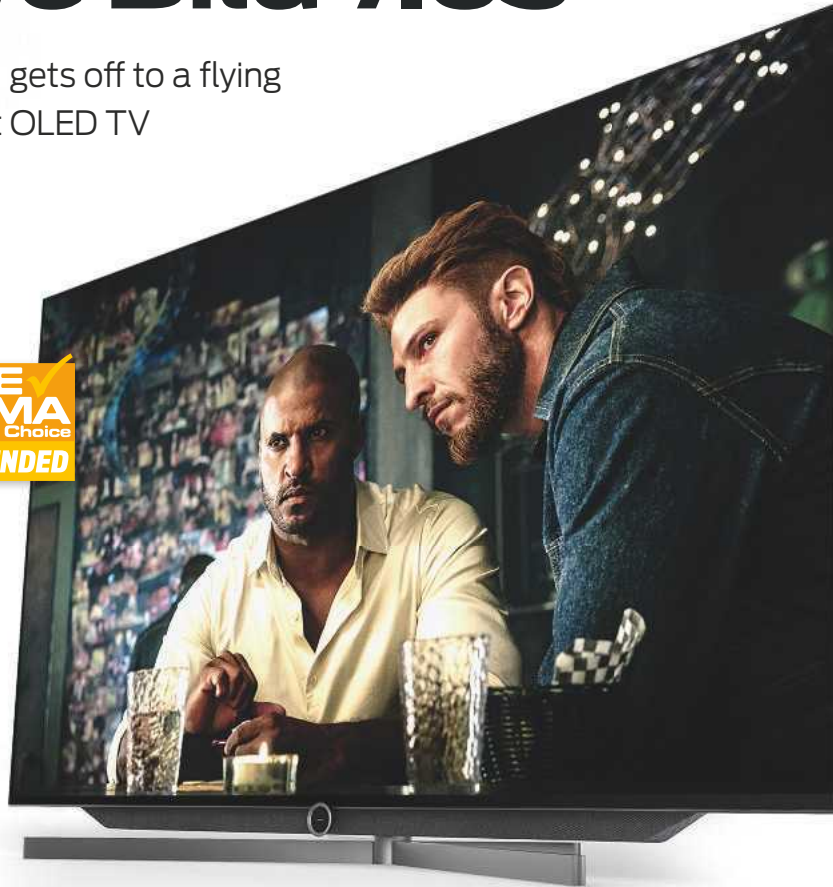
3D: No **4K:** Yes, 3,840 x 2,160 **HDR:** Yes, HDR 10; Dolby Vision; Technicolor; HLG **TUNER:** Yes, Freeview HD (Freeview Play) **CONNECTIONS:** 4 x HDMI inputs; 3 x USB; RF input; optical digital audio output; headphone jack **SOUND (CLAIMED):** 60W **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** N/A **CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** N/A **DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 1,450(w) x 825(h) x 4(d)mm **WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 7.6kg

FEATURES: Flexible, super-thin screen; separate control unit and sound system; magnetic wall mount; Dolby Atmos audio decoding via streamed sources

Loewe Bild 7.65

The German brand gets off to a flying start with its debut OLED TV

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ALTHOUGH NOT FLEXIBLE or as insanely thin as LG's roundup rival, Loewe's debut OLED TV is still a serious looker. Its gleaming metallic finish sets an opulent tone, and you can mount it on a series of different stand/wall options. And it can be rotated mechanically via the remote and gracefully glides up off its built-in soundbar when you turn it on. Geek heaven.

The Bild 7.65 also justifies its relatively steep price by shipping with an internal 1TB HDD for directly recording broadcasts from its digital tuner. It boasts an attractive home-grown smart TV system, too, that sensibly treats all source types with the same weight.

Loewe's portal does not, though, support the ITV Hub, All4 and My 5 catch-up services, or Netflix, and its Amazon Video app doesn't currently support HDR. The brand claims Amazon HDR support and those UK catch-up platforms are all due via firmware update, but couldn't confirm anything about Netflix.

Early versions of the Bild 7.65 – including my test model – carried passive 3D support. However, this feature is limited to an unspecified number of Bild 7.65 sets. If 3D matters to you, check the status of your dealer's stock before buying. HLG and Dolby Vision HDR formats are supported alongside HDR 10.

In use, the TV's images are at least a match for those of LG's OLED65W7. For instance,

while dark shots such as a kiss between Dom and Cipher in *The Fate Of The Furious* are slightly more prone to slipping into elevated black levels than they are with the LG, the Loewe set presents them with more subtle detailing in dark areas.

The Bild 7.65 also delivers fully on the rich colours the latest OLED screens are capable of, making the collection of supercars in *F&F 8*'s secret government base look even more jaw-droppingly desirable.

Powering those colours and a pleasingly punchy look to HDR images is a similar level of brightness to that achieved by LG's latest OLEDs – and more than you get from Sony's A1 [HCC #275]. And there's less noise in dark areas with brightness levels optimised for HDR, with impressive detail in the brightest whites and boldest colours retained courtesy of some effective tone mapping.

Detail levels in general are strong, ensuring a rich sense of the dilapidated decadence of Cuba's decaying architecture in *F&F 8*.

Without Loewe's motion processing in play there's a little sharpness reduction over action scenes and during camera pans, and this becomes more noticeable with the TV in 3D mode. Otherwise, though, the Bild 7.65's 3D playback (if you can find a model that features it) is excellent, with good detailing and minimal ghosting.

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes. Passive (for limited time) **4K:** Yes. 3,840 x 2,160 **HDR:** Yes. HDR 10; Dolby Vision; HLG **TUNER:** Yes. Freeview HD **CONNECTIONS:** 4 x HDMI inputs; 3 x USB; headphone jack; RF input; digital audio out; Loewe audio system connectivity **SOUND (CLAIMED):** 120W **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** N/A **CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** N/A **DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 1,452(w) x 913(h) x 52(d)mm **WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 25.2kg

FEATURES: Built-in HDD video recorder; motorised rotation; multiple stand options; motorised screen-lifting

The TV's audio performance is hugely satisfying. Drive the soundbar hard to hear it at its best, and it delivers the immense bass levels and scale of *F&F 8*'s soundtrack with exceptional depth, an expansive mid-range, and a bounty of treble detailing. Aside from only enjoying limited height extension, in fact, it almost sounds as good as the external unit in LG's W7.

Limited smart options aside – and the roughly equivalent picture performance from less expensive rivals – hold this Loewe back a touch. But its design, sonics and bonus features are easy to love.

Panasonic TX-65EZ1002

This range-topping TV features pro-grade colour processing and a Technics soundbar



PANASONIC'S TAKE ON the premium TV market isn't based predominantly on design. That's not to say it's ugly; its ultra-trim OLED panel looks impressively serious with its metallic black rear, and it ships with a striking 'dynamic blade' soundbar. It's also not short of practical features, including a strong Mozilla-designed smart TV engine. The 65EZ1002 mostly bases its premium pricing, though, on what comes out of its screen...

Right away I was struck by two things about this flagship TV's picture quality: the fantastic amount of subtlety in colours and dark areas, and the overwhelmingly natural, authentic look to pretty much every shot from our *Fate Of The Furious* 4K test disc.

A key feature is that Panasonic has improved its 3D Look-Up Table approach to colour management by extending the range of supported tones and delivering them with so-called 'Delta Zero' accuracy. The 65EZ1002 is even designed to allow content creators/calibrators to upload their own colour look-up tables; it's the first domestic TV, says the corp, that can also be used as a professional mastering monitor. And the screen has been tuned by Hollywood colourist Stefan Sonnenfeld, and comes with endorsement from the independent THX group.

Panasonic has also drawn on some of the processing and power management

techniques picked up during its plasma days to deliver class-leading control of light at just-above-black light levels – something OLED screens have traditionally struggled with.

Natural, refined HDR

The net result of all this painstaking focus on picture accuracy are astonishingly natural skin tones; beautifully defined and refined colour variations during the complex and rich-looking shots in *F&F 8*'s pre-race Cuban sequences; and some unprecedented delivery of subtle light and colour detail during the movie's night-time bomb heist in Berlin.

The finery of its light management delivers a rich sense of the screen's native 4K resolution, while a new Studio Colour HCX2 processor helps the TV upscale non-4K sources with confidence. The use of one of LG Display's latest-generation panels means that Panasonic's set packs much more HDR punch than its debut OLED TV, 2015's CZ952.

Pictures, therefore, routinely look like a fair depiction of home cinema heaven, but I do have to report a couple of issues. First, the TV doesn't support the Dolby Vision format – although Panasonic's own Hollywood-tinged processing and features do a decent job of making DV compatibility feel less important than it does on other screens. More problematic is an unexpected appearance of

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: No **4K:** Yes, 3,840 x 2,160 **HDR:** Yes, HDR 10; HLG **TUNER:** Yes, Freeview HD **CONNECTIONS:** 4 x HDMI inputs; 3 x USB; headphone jack; optical digital audio output **SOUND (CLAIMED):** 80W **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** N/A **CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** N/A **DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 1,452(w) x 837(h) x 42(d)mm **WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 20.5kg

FEATURES: Studio Colour HCX2 processing; uploadable LUT support; THX certification; external 'dynamic blade' soundbar

light banding over highly-textured dark HDR scenes. In *Arrival*, for instance, as the scientists first enter the alien vessel, I spotted vertical stripes of different light intensity across the image, and quite marked extra brightness at the image's left and right edges.

The 65EZ1002's soundbar (designed by audio guru Technics) isn't quite as effective as the solutions offered by the LG W7 and Loewe Bild 7.65. It can make dialogue sound a detached from the action and muffled at times, and sounds a bit harsh during dense action scenes. Compared to more typical TV sound systems, though, it's a substantial improvement.

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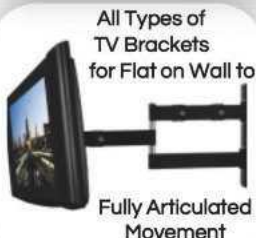
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Sony KD-75XE9405

Want proof that LCD technology can compete with OLED? Look no further than this 75in Sony



THE 75XE9405 IS the odd one out in this group test, as it uses LCD rather than OLED screen technology. On paper that would seem to put it at a disadvantage. The reality, though, is more exciting.

Gawping at the Sony reveals an instant advantage: a 75in screen. Then you clock the set's £4,900 price. That's right – the biggest TV in this roundup is comfortably the most affordable.

No LCD TV can currently match the light control and precision of our trio of OLED models. The 75XE9405 does, though, offer a sophisticated backlight system comprising a direct LED array, powered by local dimming capable of controlling more than 250 separate illumination zones. This promises far more local light control than any edge-lit LCD, and an improvement on last year's 75XD9405. The TV also carries Sony's premium processor, the X1 Extreme chipset. This packs such proven treats as Sony's Triluminos wide colour management, Super Bitmapping for removing colour striping from HDR sources, and superior upscaling of HD sources thanks to a twin database reference system.

The X1 Extreme chipset also means the 75XE9405 will get Dolby Vision HDR playback via a future firmware update, joining its existing HDR 10 and HLG support.

After spending time with the three OLED TVs I was struck by how much brighter Sony's LCD pictures were. The opening scenes of the *Fate Of The Furious* 4K Blu-ray glowed with intensity, from the gleaming bodywork of the cars to the natural-looking brightness of the sun-drenched skies.

Measurements of a 10 per cent white HDR window reveal a peak light output of around 1,240 nits, while the OLED sets all topped out at between 680 and 750 nits.

The black level depth the 75XE9405 delivers alongside bright whites and colours is remarkable. I rarely saw halos of unwanted light around stand-out objects, a feature of its 2016 predecessor.

OLED's pixel-level brightness control can deliver contrast-rich shots with even more intensity, as there's no light pollution/compromise between the brightest and darkest image elements. But the Sony's extra peak brightness compensates for that nicely.

Sony's megascreen also excels with its colour handling, crafting the bright, rich shades during Dom's first meeting with Cipher with a sweet mix of vibrancy, finesse and naturalism that proves again the worth of Sony's Triluminos engine. It's notable, too, how this model's superior brightness adds more real-world volume to its colour reproduction, at least during bright shots.

And then there's its size. Going from 65in to 75in makes quite a difference to your viewing experience, and the 75XE9405 couples its generous panel with a crisp, native 4K image. Sharpness remains intact during *F&F 8*'s frenetic ice lake car-chase sequence, too, thanks to Sony's class-leading Motionflow processing.

By not joining its rivals in sporting a soundbar, it's no surprise the audio performance here is the weakest of our quartet. The sound lacks the directness and impact of its rivals, but can still go pleasingly loud and boasts reasonable bass.

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: No **4K:** Yes. 3,840 x 2,160 **HDR:** Yes. HDR 10; HLG; Dolby Vision via upcoming update **TUNER:** Yes. Freeview HD (plus YouView) **CONNECTIONS:** 4 x HDMI inputs; 3 x USB; headphone jack, optical digital audio output **SOUND (CLAIMED):** 60W **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** N/A **CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** N/A **DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 1,673(w) x 962(h) x 62(d)mm **WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 42.8kg

FEATURES: X1 Extreme processor; Triluminos Display; X-tended Dynamic Range PRO; direct LED lighting with local dimming

Final standings

AS YOU'D HOPE of a high-end TV group test, all four of the models featured here are brilliant in their own different ways. Neither the LG nor Loewe OLEDs would look out of place in an art gallery, and the entire quartet dazzled us with simply spectacular imagery and, in the OLED TVs' cases at least, sound quality.

It's possible to rank the four contenders into some sort of league table, though – especially with price taken into account. And it's probably not going to come out how you expect.

In last place we've put LG's OLED65W7. This is a stunning piece of technological design, but unless money is no object at all you really are paying for that design. LG itself sells vastly cheaper OLED TVs that offer similar levels of picture quality.

It's a tie for second spot between the Panasonic TX-65EZ1002 and the Loewe Bild 7.65. Panasonic's somewhat more affordable TV delivers mostly incredible pictures let down by some banding during dark scenes and a lack of Dolby Vision support, while the Loewe compensates for its slightly less refined pictures and relatively impoverished smart TV system with a motorised design and powerful audio system.

Our winner, then, is Sony's 75XE9405. We're somewhat surprised that the sole LCD TV in the roundup has triumphed, but our home cinema brains can't resist its combination of vastly better picture quality (including brighter image peaks) than expected, super-sized screen and strikingly aggressive price point ■



HCC VERDICT

Sony KD-75XE9405

→ £4,900 → www.sony.co.uk



Panasonic TX-65EZ1002

→ £6,000 → www.panasonic.co.uk



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Digital Copy

There's a growing disconnect between the performance power of **Mark Craven's** regular AV setup and the second-room system he's often forced to view. What's the solution?

CONFESSION TIME. I watch a large amount of TV in (or on) my bed. Sometimes it's easier to lie in a horizontal haze on a Sunday morning than drag oneself downstairs (because this involves having to put on some clothes). Other times I think I'm ready to sleep but then discover that ITV2 is showing *Crank*, yet again, at 11.30pm. Or I find myself watching TV upstairs because my AV rig is being used by someone else to view something so mind-numbingly hideous that I can't bear to be in the room. And, perhaps most often, I've been banished there because – I'm told – it's simply not acceptable to force other household members to watch eight hours of unbroken Test Match cricket. They don't even care that it's now in Ultra HD...

So what's my bedroom AV setup like? I'll tell you. It's woeful.

An oft-spoken piece of home cinema advice is that when you upgrade your main display, you can reuse the discarded model elsewhere in the house. My most recently jettisoned TV was 65in. There was no way that was going to be used in the bedroom. Without getting rid of the bed, anyway.

So the TV employed is actually a 32in LCD, circa 2010. I've smartened it up over the years, with a Roku box, then an Amazon Fire TV, and now a Sky Q Mini. When it comes to audio, there's been a soundbar or soundbase on occasion, but these have always been removed by Mrs Craven after what is best described as a 'frank discussion.'

As my main AV setup gets better (new 4K sources, heightened audio, HDR playback, larger display), the TV in my bedroom has begun to feel worse and worse. And I didn't even like it that much to begin with. (Full disclosure: it belonged to a friend who moved abroad. When he returned, I kinda forgot to remind him about it...).

Big ambitions for a not-so-big screen

What I want in my bedroom is a 4K HDR experience, only smaller than the one I'm used to. Not as small as that suggested by my colleague Steve May (see p122), and still high quality. You might reasonably argue that Ultra HD at 40in is a waste of your optic nerve, but I still want it. More importantly, I want a TV that performs well. My bedroom set has backlight clouds so pronounced I expect it to start raining at any minute. Sports events, meanwhile, often seem to feature twice as many balls as they should do. Oh, and the user interface is hideous.

I sometimes wonder if my friend moved abroad just to be far away from this TV.

The good news is that there are 40in 4K HDR sets available that would probably take up little more space than this bulky seven-year-old model. But not as many as you might think. I've hunted around and found a choice of three – two from Samsung's 6 Series and Panasonic's EX600 (pictured). LG and Sony's 4K ranges don't start until 43in, which is dangerously big for my boudoir.

These sets, at around £500-£600, are not inexpensive, but aren't top-of-the-range when it comes to image processing. What I would like is the option of a flagship set at a diminutive size (actually a screen size a shade smaller than you used to be able to get with Pioneer's Kuro plasmas). The TV industry seems loath to go in this direction, though, even as the breadth of 4K HDR sources expands to include gaming, streaming and (eventually) broadcast TV as well as discs, and household members seek boltholes to get their own personal fix. The solution, it seems, is to have a monster TV in every room... Will one of you tell Mrs C for me? ■

*Is your second-room setup a match for the main event?
Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com*

Mark Craven refers to ITV2 as the 'Crank and Shaun of the Dead Channel' as he's never tuned in and found it showing anything else





Film Fanatic

Anton van Beek celebrates the work of the late George A. Romero, and hopes to remind everyone that there's more to the filmmaker than just classic zombie films...

THERE HAS BEEN a lot written about horror legend George A. Romero since his recent passing at the age of 77. The fact that so much of it has focused on his so-called 'Dead' trilogy – 1968's *Night of the Living Dead*, 1978's *Dawn of the Dead* and 1985's *Day of the Dead* – is understandable for the significant impact those films had on cinema.

I've seen Romero referred to as the 'Godfather of the Dead' and 'the father of the modern movie zombie' in obits. Yet his lengthy (and influential) film career wasn't solely concerned with undead ghouls feasting on the living while functioning as astute social and political commentary. Anyone planning a Romero retrospective in his honour should cast their net a little wider.

After *Night of...*, and an unsuccessful foray outside of the horror genre with the romantic comedy *There's Always Vanilla* (1971), Romero returned in 1973 with the double-header of *Season of the Witch* and *The Crazies*. The former is a rather uneven tale of suburban witchcraft; the latter was a real return to the shocking highs of his 1968 debut, with its protagonists fleeing faceless gas-mask-wearing US soldiers 'cleaning up' in the wake of the accidental release of a biological weapon.

Better yet, however, was the oft-overlooked *Martin* (1978), Romero's unique take on vampire lore. Tender, ambiguous and haunting, **this story of a shy and disturbed teenager who may or may not be a vampire is a low-budget masterpiece**. It was also Romero's first collaboration with special effects legend Tom Savini – the pair would go on to have a remarkably fruitful working relationship (which would culminate with Savini directing the underrated 1990 remake of *Night of the Living Dead* from a revised script by Romero – see p26).

Savini also got the chance to show off his acting talents in another of my favourite Romero movies, 1981's *Knightriders*. Exploring the clash between personal ideology and commercialisation – through the medium of a motorcycle gang who dress in armour and stage jousts on their bikes – it's a film of madcap genius.

Anthology flick *Creepshow* (pictured) followed in 1982 and let Romero give his love of gory 'gags' the perfect outlet with an affectionate homage to the horror comics of the 1950s.

His subsequent efforts – *Monkey Shines* (1988), Dario Argento collaboration *Two Evil Eyes* (1990), troubled Stephen King adaptation *The Dark Half* (1993), the little-seen *Bruiser* (2000) and his second zombie trilogy: *Land of the Dead* (2005), *Diary of the Dead* (2007) and *Survival of the Dead* (2009) – don't quite measure up to his earlier films. But each is enjoyable in its own right, adding another chapter to a fascinating and distinctive body of work.

Bringing the horror home (or not)

Sadly, getting hold of all of Romero's films on BD is impossible. *Martin* is unavailable anywhere in the world at present, possibly due to quality of the image assets or the licensing fee involved. Even his best-known films – *Night of the Living Dead*, *Dawn of the Dead* and *Day of the Dead* – while available on the format, are desperately in need of new restorations.

One bit of good news is that only a couple of days prior to Romero's death, a new Blu-ray boxset was announced containing feature-packed restorations of *There's Always Vanilla*, *Season of the Witch* and *The Crazies*. This should fill a gap in fans' disc collections when it arrives in October ■

Have you got a favourite George A. Romero movie?
Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com

Anton van Beek is holding out hope that Romero's final script (a zombie race car movie) may still make it into production one day...



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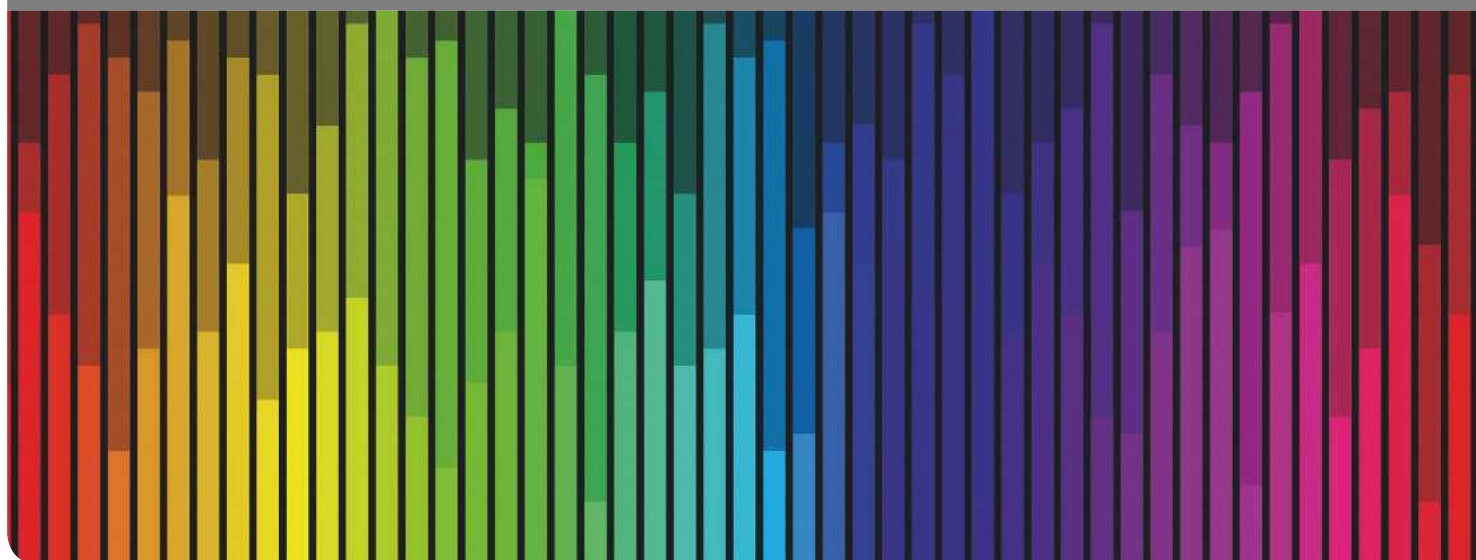
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In The Mix

If you've invested plenty in first-class home cinema hardware, **Jon Thompson** believes you should invest in a display calibration, too – or maybe even do it yourself

IT'S THE MIDDLE of Summer, not the time of year to be sitting in the dark. Long winter nights are best for tweaking your home cinema. Indeed, calibration is seen by many as a dark art. But if you're reading this magazine because you're interested in how to get the best from your AV system, it's an art you should be interested in. If you aren't, and simply want to put on a disc and not even think why the image has a green tint, then you can turn the page – I'm going to run through the basic equipment you need and how much it would cost to get a professional calibration kit for yourself. I'm assuming you'd know how to use the equipment, which is an art in itself.

Some of the basics you can do by eye, but **you need a colour meter and calibration software for image perfection.**

When it comes to meters, I think only two are worth considering. First, the i1 Display Pro OEM RevB, which is about £250. This has an extended dynamic range, with a max luma capability of 2,000 nits, ideal for HDR on current consumer displays. The other is Klein's K10-A Tristimulus (£6,600), superior because it has no issue reading black/dark parts of the picture. Regardless of the light level, the K10-A reads 256 measurements per second, and then gives an average from that. It would take a number of minutes for the i1 Display Pro to do something similar with nowhere near the accuracy. The K10-A has a range of 0.0001-10,000 nits.

Get one of these and you'll also need software (£2,600 for Lightspace XPS), a good laptop with the right ports, and a test pattern generator/analyser. The ones we tend to use in post-production can cost up to £75,000, so just for calibration are not practical. Better to go for something like Murideo's SIX-G, which is portable and fully-featured, with built-in HDR (including Dolby Vision) test patterns.

Now you may have spent up to £16,000 on the basic test equipment to calibrate your display. Could you not just pay someone much less to do the job for you? Yes. To do it properly and calibrate the whole display chain from player to screen will take a few days for the first time, though, so even this option won't be cheap. And equipment does drift over time, so be prepared to get it done more than once.

Why you go to all this cost and trouble anyway? To quantify an error in the image when calibrating, we use a system called delta errors, or Delta-E 1976, and on an out-of-the-box TV the Delta-E error is often massive. All commercially available Blu-rays (I'll stick with SDR in this instance) are mastered to a standard set by the SMPTE, with D65 white point, a screen brightness of 100 nits, REC.709 colour space and a gamma of 2.4. You want your display to mirror that.

A classic test example is the interrogation scene in *Oblivion*. Morgan Freeman sits in the dark shining a light in Tom Cruise's face. On an uncalibrated display, you may not see Freeman, only hear him. You might just see a flame as he lights a cigar. But you should be able to see him clearly, the reflection in his glasses, the whites of his teeth, etc. The first shot features his boots to the right of the frame. I had nothing but Freeman's voice on a recent TV. After it was calibrated, it was like looking at another display.

My point is, spending serious money on a home cinema without having it set up correctly is pointless. And even if you're not going to do it yourself, a basic understanding of what's required is useful when hiring a professional. Ask them what they're going to be doing, and why they're going to do it. Make sure they know their Delta Error from Chuck Norris's *Delta Force*. As always, knowledge is power... ■

Have you had your TV or projector professionally calibrated? Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com

When he's not in his screening room, **Jon Thompson** tweets about Hollywood gossip, movie-making and digital mastering at [@johnnyfocal](https://twitter.com/johnnyfocal)



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Feedback

Got an axe to grind? Need to comment on current technology? Want to share your knowledge with our readers? **Team HCC** is here to help

Make all my kit work!

Thanks for a great magazine of which I have been a subscriber for a number of years. The arrival of this on my door mat is the highlight of my month and I cannot wait to get a cup of coffee to flick through the contents before digesting the various articles at length at a later date.

Over to the question which I am hoping you can help me with. Since I started with the practice of trying to create the cinema experience in my living room – which began with a Sony C6 Betamax – I have never come across a problem like this one. And I believe it may affect many more of your avid readers in the future.

Having just completed a redecoration of the living room, I took this opportunity to update some pieces of kit and hide some of the wires. The most recent purchases were an LG OLED TV (E6), Denon AVR-X3300W and an Oppo UDP-203, all of which are 4K enabled (I already had Sky Q, too).

I also have a Sony VPL-HW40ES (not 4K) projector and screen, plus various speakers



Sony's VPL-HW40ES won't accept a native 4K source

projector not being 4K then the 'handshake' via HDMI is simply not working. If I have Sky Q set to UHD as well as the Oppo player to watch on the LG TV all being routed through the Denon, the TV works great with a fantastic picture. The problem, which I'm sure you can guess, is the projector refuses to operate with these settings and states the 'frequency is out of range'. My kit supplier suggested a downscaler from 4K to 1080p and let me borrow a Wyrestorm EXP-CON-4K-DD to place

between the Denon and the projector, but the projector still refuses to work with the same message as before. Having completed a search on the internet there are various other downscalers available all claiming to resolve this problem, but my understanding is they not only need to reduce the pixel count but also the HDR element of the signal as well.

This must be an ever increasing problem with many of your readers with 4K TVs being purchased and this not working with the other

(KEF and Monitor Audio) to allow a 5.1.2 sound system. I would love to upgrade the projector but at this time I am not convinced by the quality of 4K and HDR on these, plus the prices are high still and are currently being blocked by my very tolerant wife.

The issue is getting all of these elements to work together with HDCP 2.2 and this is currently being quite a challenge; with the

Do we need more film noir?

Are the black-and-white versions of *Mad Max: Fury Road* and *Logan* [see HCC #275] starting a trend? Having watched both on my 4K setup I can't really see the point. Sure, they look different but you could easily just dial the colour down on your TV and get a similar effect!

The noir version of *Logan* was an 'extra' on the normal 4K release. Re-releasing *Mad Max* all over again on Blu-ray in black-and-white just seems like a way to suck more money out of loyal fans. Are there more black-and-white versions of big movies in the pipeline?

Anthony S, via email

Anton van Beek replies: I enjoyed *Logan Noir*, but you need to be fan of any film to want to watch it twice in quick succession. At the moment, we don't know of any future black-and-white versions in-bound. It may just be a passing fad...



Logan Noir: an extra on the Blu-ray release

elements of their setup. The only solution that I have currently is to reduce the output of both Sky Q and my Oppo deck, which is defeating the object of the upgrade in the first place. Any help with the connections or a downscaler that will actually work between the Denon and the Sony projector would be really appreciated and make me a happy man again.

Greg King

Mark Craven replies: This is an interesting problem, Greg. You have a 4K/HDR setup (OLED TV, AVR, Blu-ray deck and Sky Q), but you also want to use those sources with your Full HD projector – without having to fiddle around with settings.

Now, I would argue that reducing the output of both the Sky Q box and Oppo player doesn't defeat the object of your upgrade. The upgrade is built around your 4K OLED TV, which you say gives a fantastic picture.

Your Sony projector has HDMI v1.4a inputs, meaning it won't accept a 4K signal, nor one with HDCP 2.2 copy protection. And it wouldn't know what to do with such a signal anyway.

Feeding it your Sky Q box in Ultra HD resolution mode will throw up an error message, and with no Auto setting on the PVR, you will have to switch between the two.

When it comes to the Oppo deck, Ultra HD Blu-rays, thanks to the magic of HDMI handshaking, should play out in 1080p and SDR on your PJ – the player will receive info that the Sony doesn't support the format so will put its 4K-resolution HDR encode back in its virtual box. To be doubly sure, I checked using an elderly 32in LCD TV (see p79) and Oppo UDP-203. *The LEGO Batman 4K* disc played out in Full HD, SDR – but with a prior screen message explaining that for the best image quality I should use a 4K TV.

The above situation is achieved with the Oppo's output resolution set to 'Auto' within the settings menu. This enables it to match its resolution to the display at the other end of the line. You can also cycle through these settings via the 'Resolution' button on the remote. If your player is already set to this, then something has gone wrong somewhere in your chain.

Before spending any money on an external downscaling gizmo (which to me seems to be overkill for a problem that's more annoying than disastrous), check your BD deck's settings, and see what happens when the Denon AVR is removed from the video chain.

Should I go for Dolby Atmos?

I have a dilemma. It is highly likely that I will be moving house in the near future and should this be the case, it will be an opportunity to reconfigure my current 7.1 surround system to a Dolby Atmos 5.1.2 system, the 5.1.2 limitation being with my Denon AVR-X2300W receiver.

★ Star Letter...

I want a TV without speakers...

I am planning to upgrade to a top OLED screen in the Autumn and am drawing up a short list thanks to your impressively insightful and analytical reviews of the LG E7 screen in HCC #274 and the Sony KD-55A1 in the last issue. With Panasonic OLED models also looking to offer strong competition and Dolby Vision finally emerging, this could be the moment to justify such a significant investment (along with an Oppo UDP-205 following your predictably strong review).

Just one question: why does it seem impossible to buy a top-quality TV screen without any sound option at all in much the same way one can with a projector? On your own admission the Sony KD-55A1 will not easily accommodate a soundbar in front of its low-slung, jaw-dropping design but surely these top-of-the-range panels would be part of an equally audio-dynamic sound system anyway, somewhere between a 5.1 and 7.2.2 installation?

I was lucky enough to have access via my dealer to a Samsung UE46 professional monitor at my last upgrade a few years ago which I then had professionally calibrated. Even before the calibration, this panel was sharper and smoother to my eyes above the more domestic similarly-priced models available from Samsung and others at that time. Am I the only one who would rather pour the money into a pure, top-quality screen-only design rather than automatically have to acquire one with a mediocre sound that is never ever going to be used if set up in tandem with a processor and speaker array of similar audio impact?

Graham Griggs

Mark Craven replies: Monitors (as opposed to 'TVs') did used to be much

more common – Pioneer used to sell a Kuro model without speakers or a tuner. But as large flatscreen TVs have moved from being luxuries to everyday items, in-built speakers have become common (the average customer wants speakers) and manufacturers don't like to have split production lines for different models. Which is why even high-end tellies come with speakers as a matter of course. (More annoying are ones like LG's W7 wallpaper TV that feature external speaker bars that also happen to have all the HDMI inputs, meaning you can't throw them in the loft...).

I doubt you are the only person thinking a speakerless TV would be just right for their AV setup, but do even serious home cinema owners never ever use the speakers on their TV? Not everyone in a household wants to wrestle with the AVR remote, even if HDMI standby passthrough means they don't have to worry so much.

At the moment, TV brands seem to be using new speaker forms (soundbars) and format support (Atmos) to help differentiate their sets from others, so I'm not expecting audio to be sacked off by any of the major players anytime soon.

Star letter-writer Graham grabs *Vikings: Season 4 Volume 2* on Blu-ray. Continuing the blood-soaked saga of Viking ruler Ragnar Lothbrok (played by Travis Fimmel), the breathtaking *Vikings: Season 4 Volume 2* is packed with all of the action and intrigue fans have come to expect from the hit TV series, and is now available to own on Blu-ray and DVD courtesy of Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer and Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment.



I'm not too worried about the AVR's limitation because the purpose of the house move is to downsize and therefore space will be at a premium. Not that I currently reside in a mansion – my setup is currently housed in your standard through-lounge affair, no more than 25 square meters, which will reduce to an area more 'square' at around 18 square meters. While I am happy to downsize my house, I am not happy to downsize my home entertainment system and I have made sure that the new location will easily accommodate my 65in screen.

The dilemma I have is this: my current 7.1 setup comprises of M&K K-Series speakers

– 3 x K7s on L/C/R duties, 2 x K4 tri-poles on surround and 2 x K5 satellites for rear backs, plus a REL Q-150E sub for the oomph!

The four choices I have are as follows;

1. Bin off the 2 x K5s in favour of a pair of suitably positioned in-ceiling speakers, with obviously some cost attached to installation (moving home is costly enough). I assume this would produce the best results but which ones would suit my M&Ks best?

2. Bin off the 2 x K5s in favour of a pair of Dolby Atmos-enabled wedge affairs, such as the PSB Imagine XAs or similar. The caveat to this is that I would be unable to precariously balance these on top of my slender K7s and

therefore the only other option would be to wall-mount them in the vicinity of the K7s. I think Dolby specify within three feet, which may provide a cheaper solution than the in-ceiling option.

3. The radical option – keep the 2 x K5s and use them as front-height channels in a high wall-mount configuration (angled downwards) which even though would probably set Ray Dolby spinning in his grave, could be more favourable for DTS: X (which the little Denon can dish out) or at the very least provide a cheaper (just drilling a few holes) practical solution...

4. Forget the whole thing and stick with 7.1 and live in the now... seriously, though, would I potentially be better off with 5.1.2 over 7.1?
Ian Forster

Richard Stevenson replies: Well, my fifth suggestion would be to get a nine-channel AVR and go for 7.1.2, but I understand that 'buy a new receiver and more speakers' isn't always the preferred advice.

Would you potentially be better off with 5.1.2 than 7.1? Yes and no. A well-positioned 7.1 system can be a thing of beauty, and there are many more 7.1 mixes around than their used to be. Those rear back speakers can be excellent at creating an authentically enveloping soundstage. Switch to 5.1.2 and you'll no doubt find your favourite mixes sound a little different.

On the other hand, Atmos/DTS:X height can be a showstopper, and there's plenty of software available. The temptation may be too much to ignore, especially if your new downsized living room is less amenable to rear back speakers than your current one.

The first couple of weeks in a new house are always a bit messy – boxes lying around waiting to be unpacked, paint tester pots spilling over the carpet – so you'll probably never get a better time to install in-ceiling



speakers. This would be my preference for a neat, tidy and potent Atmos setup, provided the cost/work involved isn't too prohibitive. Check out Dolby's guide on where to site the speakers – slightly in front of your listening position – and check out M&K's IW range.

Wall-mounting upfirs means you're hoping that's where they will sound best, and it may well be that you'll wish you had them somewhere else. Not balanced wobbly on top of your K7s, though.

As for switching the K5s to front height duty and assigning these as Dolby Atmos heights, maybe try this now in your current setup to see what the performance is like in comparison to your 7.1 array. Obviously your future, somewhat smaller, room will sound different, but it will give you an idea.

Time for an upgrade already?

I have in my cinema setup a Denon AVR, a Sky+HD box, a Panasonic DX902 TV and a Panasonic DMP-UB900 Ultra HD Blu-ray player. I would like to know about Dolby Vision discs, which are slowly coming out.

Would I have to get rid of my Panasonic package? Sell it on to free up money to

purchase at great cost – possibly about £5,000 – a Dolby Vision-supporting TV and player? And with the downside of this the loss of 3D support which I have as of now?

There are rumours that Disney will have Dolby Vision HDR on its Ultra HD Blu-rays. Will disc manufacturers have both formats on them?

I would rather not have to swap out my TV and Ultra HD Blu-ray player as both are extremely good. I would appreciate your advice without having to give my bank manager a heart attack.

One last thought: do you think that Ultra HD Blu-ray players were rushed out to try and compete with downloads from the likes of Amazon and Netflix before they were properly thought out? Hence the mess that I think we're in with rival HDR formats.

Daniel Edward

Mark Craven replies: Don't get rid of your Panasonic TV and 4K Blu-ray player, Daniel! That's a fine Ultra HD/HDR-capable setup (not to mention with 3D playback) and all 4K HDR Blu-rays will feature HDR 10. It's a mandatory part of the format's specification. Ultra HD Blu-rays with Dolby Vision (DV) also have to play out in HDR 10, so there will be no discs launched that you won't be able to view. You just won't be able to view them in DV.

Rumours about Disney launching Dolby Vision UHD titles have grown so loud that even I started to believe them, but its first title (*Guardians of the Galaxy Vol 2*, out in August) seems to be HDR 10 only (the disc wasn't available at the time or writing). What happens next is all speculation.

Was the format rushed out? No. In my opinion it was delayed too long... ■



Contact us...

Write to HCC, AV Tech Media Ltd, Suite 25, Eden House, Enterprise Way, Edenbridge, Kent, TN8 6HF, or email us at letters@homecinemachoice.com

Please note: we cannot guarantee to print/answer all the letters we receive. Sorry.

WIN! Great Blu-rays up for grabs...

Just email your answer to Competitions@homecinemachoice.com to be in with a chance to win

Ghost in the Shell

Enjoy a thrilling and eye-popping vision of the future with the sci-fi blockbuster *Ghost in the Shell*, which is out now to own on Digital HD, 4K Ultra HD Blu-ray™, Blu-ray 3D™, Blu-ray™ and DVD.

To celebrate the release, we've teamed up with Paramount Home Media Distribution and have five copies of the *Ghost in the Shell* Blu-ray™ to give away.



Question:

Scarlett Johansson plays which superhero in the Marvel Cinematic Universe?

Answer:

- A) Black Panther B) Black Widow
C) Scarlet Witch

Email your answer with '*Ghost in the Shell*' as the subject heading – and don't forget to include your postal address!



Free Fire

British filmmaker Ben Wheatley's explosive love letter to the action genre is available now on Digital HD, Blu-ray and DVD courtesy of

StudioCanal. To be in with the chance of winning one of five *Free Fire* Blu-rays, simply answer the following question correctly...

Question:

Ben Wheatley previously directed a film based on which novel by J.G. Ballard?

Answer:

- A) Crash B) Empire of the Sun
C) High-Rise

Email your answer with '*Free Fire*' as the subject heading – and don't forget to include your postal address!



The Graduate: 50th Anniversary Edition

Classic US comedy-drama *The Graduate* turns 50 this year and to celebrate StudioCanal is re-releasing the film on DVD, BD and

Digital HD on August 14 with a new 4K restoration and a host of extras. To mark the release we've got five *The Graduate: 50th Anniversary Edition* Blu-rays up for grabs!

Question:

Who played the iconic role of Mrs. Robinson in *The Graduate*?

Answer:

- A) Anne Bancroft B) Ann Widdecombe
C) Penelope Ann Miller

Email your answer with '*The Graduate*' as the subject heading – and don't forget to include your postal address!



The Handmaiden

Visionary director Park Chan-wook's latest film is a sumptuous and exhilarating period thriller inspired by Sarah Waters' best-selling crime novel *Fingersmith*.

The Handmaiden is available now on DVD, Blu-ray and two-disc Special Edition Blu-ray and thanks to Curzon Artificial Eye we've got five Blu-rays to be won!

Question:

Which of the following is not part of Park Chan-wook's 'Vengeance Trilogy'?

Answer:

- A) Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance
B) Oldboy C) Baby Vengeance

Email your answer with '*The Handmaiden*' as the subject heading – and don't forget to include your postal address!

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Certified: AV-Holic!

HCC reader **Ali** makes use of affordable gear – and a BenQ short-throw projector – to bring a bigscreen movie experience to a snug media room that his family love



Ali fires his 1080p projector directly onto his unpainted wall – an experience his daughter refers to as 'Wall TV'...

LEGO Minifigures adorn the kit-rack (below), while poster art and some decorative paintwork (right) bring a touch of cinema glamour to the media room





Welcome to the AV-Holics Hall of Fame! Introduce yourself...

My name is Ali Sharaq (AKA Karar) and I'm 35. I am from Pakistan but currently living in Saudi Arabia. I work at Mustang Wood Group as a Mechanical Engineer.

System kit-list:

In my media room I have a BenQ W1080ST 1080p projector, Samsung HT-F5500 1000W Blu-ray player and 5.1 speaker setup, and WD Live TV Player (for alternate USB video inputs).

My four-year-old daughter started calling the BenQ image 'Wall TV' and since then we have called this the Wall TV room.

I was on a tight budget when shifting to a new home to decorate all the rooms, and from the same budget I had to set up my AV system. I was cramped for space but wanted this room to be different from my regular TV lounge. The room size wasn't big so I opted for the BenQ short-throw projector to get the biggest screen size from a small distance. I spent \$3,000 (US) on all items, including furniture, hardware and decorations.

What was the last thing you added to your setup?

Two things: the red LED lights for the room and WD Live TV Player. And, of course, more LEGO Minifigures, as one can never have enough of those!

Are you thinking of upgrading anything?

I am still waiting for 4K home projectors to become more economical. Until then I have no big upgrades planned. But I have minor



All Ali's kit, furniture and decorations came to just \$3,000

upgrades underway. I've ordered a wall-mounting kit for the projector, plus sound-reactive LED lights to add more environmental effects for those heavy bass movements.

What's your favourite bit of kit, and why?

I guess that would be the BenQ projector as it allows incredible 200in projection over a short distance with crisp colours, and even active 3D support, without breaking the bank.

On a smaller scale it would be the LED lights. These not only give the room ambience but also allow me to show off my LEGO collection even when the main lights are off. What good is a collection if you don't show it off?

And what movies do you use to demo your system?

Other than the IMAX and Dolby demo videos. I love to play movies with an intensive surround speaker track. These include *300: Rise of an Empire*, *Dawn of the Planet of Apes*, *King Kong* (2005) and recently *Hacksaw Ridge*.

And what are your Top Five favourite flicks?

That would be *Sucker Punch*, *Fast & Furious 7*, *Captain America: Civil War*, *300* and *Deadpool*.

Do you stream content from Netflix/Amazon/Sky etc?

Even though the BD player has smart apps and my projector has wireless streaming capabilities, I don't use streaming for movies.

Does the setup get a lot of use?

We have a ritual of watching movies on 'Wall TV' every Friday night. Moreover, once a month I call all my friends over for a 'Wall TV Movie Bash'. We order in dinner and popcorn, etc. All the movie shows I organize are with customised intros, music videos and trailers for a wholesome cinema experience

What do friends/family think of the cinema?

They love it, especially considering as there are no public movie theatres in Saudi Arabia. This is the next best thing ■

Share your cinema system in the mag!

If you want to be in **HCC**, you'll need to send us some hi-res images of your cinema room. Here are a few tips...

1. Go big. Set your camera to take images at the largest possible size, and at the highest resolution. Don't worry about cropping or resizing – we will make them print-ready.
2. Get in focus. Make sure your photos are as sharp and clear as possible. If you have one, use a tripod, or place your camera on a flat, steady surface and take pictures on a delay. The sharper they are, the bigger we can print them.
3. Let some light in. While we tend to watch movies in the dark, our cinema systems look their best when they are lit. If you can shoot with natural daylight, do so. If your room doesn't get a lot of light (a garage conversion, for instance) then switch on

whatever lights are fitted. Avoid using flash wherever possible.

4. Be thorough. Send photos of as much of the room as possible. Images of both the front and back of the room, the kit rack, speakers, seating, disc shelf, movie poster art... The more the merrier.

5. Don't be shy. Send a picture of yourself!

6. Show us more. Got pictures of your room before it was a cinema? Or snaps of work being done? We love to see these, too.

Now what? Email your images to letters@homecinemachoice.com with the subject heading 'AV-Holic', and provide your answers to the questions above – then we'll be in touch!



...And blag Denon's AH-MM200 headphones!

The kind people at Denon are giving away a pair of portable, over-ear headphones to our AV-Holic each month. The AH-MM200s, which typically retail for £120, feature 30mm triple-layer drivers, lightweight earcups and have been tuned to deliver a smooth, natural and faithful tonal balance. Two cables are provided – one with integrated controls and mic for portable use, another longer cable for home entertainment.

COMING SOON



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PLAYBACK

→ **SOFTWARE HIGHLIGHTS** **POWER RANGERS** Bigscreen reboot takes the TV heroes in a darker direction **THE FATE OF THE FURIOUS** 4K platter speeds across the Atlantic **FREE FIRE** Action-thriller targets your home cinema **AMERICAN GODS** Fantasy series delivers heavenly hi-def visuals **MINDHORN** The Isle of Man's top detective is on the case & MORE!

Cyborg with a soul

Ghost in the Shell → Paramount/Universal Pictures → All-region BD

Scarlett Johansson cements her action star credentials in Hollywood's big-budget remake of Japanese anime classic *Ghost in the Shell*. Find out if it lives up to the original as we take the Blu-ray for a spin on p96.

HCC RATINGS KEY...

Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★
Acceptable	★★★
Disappointing	★★
Dire	★

All prices quoted are approximate and may have changed

With a name like Rita Repulsa, she was always going to end up a villain...



Powering up a new generation

This cinematic adaptation of the hit TV series is at its best when its teen heroes aren't so super



Goldar and the Megazord come to blows in the film's super-sized finale

→ POWER RANGERS

Rebirth and reinvention are nothing new for the *Power Rangers* franchise. In the 24 years since it first kicked its way onto screens around the globe in the guise of smallscreen sensation *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers*, the kid-friendly superhero series has gone through 20 different incarnations. Right from the off, however, it's clear that this latest version is taking things in a different direction.

Okay, so the basic premise remains the same as ever: five teenagers from the town of Angel Grove find mysterious 'coins' that imbue them with superhuman abilities, enabling them to defend the Earth as 'Power Rangers' under the guidance of disembodied alien Zordon and his robot sidekick Alpha 5. But this time around it plays out with a more serious tone peppered by some surprisingly risqué gags. It's clearly conceived as a more 'grown-up' *Power Rangers* designed to appeal to those who enjoyed the show in the '90s and want their blast of nostalgia in a form that won't be too embarrassing.

It's a surprising direction to take with the material and one that ultimately harms the film as much as helps it.

The renewed commitment to characterisation transforms the first half of the movie into a surprisingly enjoyable *Breakfast Club*-esque

teen drama. Sadly, those who find this engrossing will no doubt be disappointed when it's dumped in favour of the obligatory CGI-heavy finale. Meanwhile, those who are simply here for the action will be dismayed by the fact that our heroes don't actually 'suit-up' until around the 90-minute mark.

The upshot is that, while *Power Rangers* is much more enjoyable than we expected, it's failure to find the right balance between character moments and 'Mighty Morphin' mayhem leaves it feeling like two very different movies that have been bolted together.

Picture: *Power Rangers* comes out fighting on Blu-ray with a reference-quality 2.40:1 1080p encode. Shot using Red Epic Dragon cameras, the imagery is razor-sharp and packed with super-crisp textures and detailing. Meanwhile, the all-important colours are vibrant and varied, contrast is excellent, and blacks are impressively stable.

Audio: Joining the first-rate image is a Dolby Atmos mix that makes consistent and convincing use of the surround and height channels, with scenes such as the prehistoric prologue (Chapter 1) and a mine chase/train crash (Chapter 4) placing you slap-bang in the action. Spatial effects hit with pin-point accuracy; bass rumbles with menace.

Extras: As well as a commentary by the writer and director, this BD finds room for a 140-minute *Making of...* doc; 18 deleted/alternate scenes; outtakes; and the trailer (with its own chat track!).

HCC VERDICT

Power Rangers

→ Lionsgate → Region B BD
→ £25

WE SAY: These revamped Power Rangers deliver a mighty morphin' AV experience on Blu-ray.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★



24: Legacy

Twentieth Century Fox → All-region BD
£40



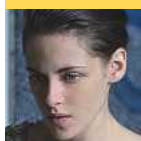
It's all *The X-Files*' fault. Following last year's 'event series' revival of the cult sci-fi series, Fox has now seen fit to drag

24 out of mothballs for a new 12-episode run. While there's no Jack Bauer this time around, in every other regard *24: Legacy* is business as usual: foreign terrorists, dodgy politicians, scheming family members and the ever-present ticking clock. No wonder it feels so tired and pointless. Still, the 1080p imagery is good enough to show up some of the cut-price CGI effects, while the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mixes make the most of shoot-outs. Seven deleted scenes and a promo video are the set's only extras.



Personal Shopper

Icon → Region B BD
£20



This arty ghost story stars Kristen Stewart as a young American attempting to contact the spirit of her dead

brother while working as the personal shopper for a wealthy socialite in France. Far removed from the usual fright flick, director Olivier Assayas's enigmatic tale is definitely not for everyone, but like the best ghost stories it still conjures up a couple of scenes that will haunt you long after the credits roll. This Blu-ray's 1080p encode and DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix capture the film's cool visuals and low-key sound design perfectly. Sadly, the only extra on offer is a trailer.



Batman and Harley Quinn

Warner Bros. → All-region BD
£21



The DC Universe series of animated films takes a step back to the '90s fan-favourite *Batman: The Animated Series* with this latest effort. But while it may look the part, there are

also some obvious changes, including Melissa Rauch stepping in to voice Harley Quinn and a far raunchier sense of humour allowed by the lack of broadcast censorship. On top of a sharply delineated 1.78:1 1080p encode of the film (with rather front-biased DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio), this Blu-ray offers up a look at Harley's origins, a chat with Nightwing voice actor Loren Lester and two episodes of the classic *Batman* 'toon.



The ultimate shoot-'em up?

Brit director Ben Wheatley has cooked up a treat for fans of gigantic gunfights...

→ FREE FIRE

Guns have been a frequent feature in cinema since the medium's very earliest days. But while people pulling pistols on one another and the ballistic ballet that follows are sights we've all become used to, rarely has the gunfight itself been the entire purpose of a film. Until now...

Boston, 1978. Irishmen Chris (Cillian Murphy) and Frank (Michael Smiley) arrive at an abandoned warehouse with their intermediary, Justine (Brie Larson), to meet deal-broker Ord (Arnie Hammer) and South African arms dealer Vernon (Sharlto Copley). Their aim is to buy a cache of guns, but things get off to a tetchy start when it turns out that Vernon has brought a different type of assault rifle to the one that was ordered. Nor is the situation helped when it turns out that one of Frank's underlings was involved in an ugly bar fight with Vernon's driver the preceding night. Tempers flare, accusations fly and it isn't long before the bullets start to do the same.

Coming off the back of last year's bigscreen adaptation of J.G. Ballard's *High-Rise*, director Ben Wheatley and co-writer Amy Jump have gone back to basics with this blackly comic and unflinchingly violent 90-minute shoot-out. This is a film with no interest in concepts such as moral complexity or character arcs. It's sole purpose is to trap a bunch of people in a single location and find the humour in them arguing and shooting one another.

Utterly chaotic and refusing to take itself seriously, *Free Fire* is akin to an ultra-violent *Looney Tunes* cartoon with everybody playing a tooled-up Wile E. Coyote. And it's just as much fun as that sounds.



The calm before the storm...



Picture: *Free Fire*'s 2.40:1-framed digital photography looks about as good as you could expect on Blu-ray given that the filmmakers have suffused most of it with a distinctive yellow tint. While this works well from a stylistic point-of-view in giving the film a more retro '70s aesthetic, the colour grading also impacts on detailing and black levels, with the latter frequently appearing crushed and holding little in the way of shadow information.

Audio: The movie's DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack is an energetic affair that makes entertaining use of panning effects around the soundstage, but isn't up there with the likes of *John Wick 2* in terms of brutal dynamism. That said, there's plenty of punchy LFE on offer to underscore the biggest impacts, such as Chapter 8's exploding gas tanks.

Extras: An informative and engaging commentary is joined by a 16-minute *Making of...* featurette, and interviews with Wheatley, Murphy and Smiley.

HCC VERDICT

Free Fire

→ StudioCanal → Region B BD
→ £23

WE SAY: Ben Wheatley's violent action comedy acquits itself well on Blu-ray, so give it a shot...

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

A brighter future?

Cyberpunk sci-fi gets a vibrant visual makeover in this live-action version of the classic Japanese anime...



→ GHOST IN THE SHELL

Based on Masamune Shirow's legendary late '80s manga series of the same name, this Hollywood production of *Ghost in the Shell* follows the exploits of the Major (Scarlett Johansson), a highly-advanced cyborg working for counterterrorist taskforce Section 9. The first of her kind, the Major is an entirely artificial body housing a brain rescued from a dying young woman.

Investigating a series of cyber-terrorist attacks on executives at Hanka Robotics (the company that 'made' her), the Major discovers that they were orchestrated by a mysterious hacker known as Kuze (Michael Carmen Pitt), who will stop at nothing to stop the company continuing its experiments and churning out more cyborgs. But the more the Major digs into the case, the more she learns that things are not what they seem – leaving her wondering if she can even trust her own memories, or if they are in fact every bit as artificial as her new body.

Even if you aren't already familiar with the various animated *Ghost in the Shell* films and TV series that have come out of Japan in the past two decades



The film merges characters and storylines from the various Japanese animations



(see boxout opposite) the core setup of this US live-action take on the material should surely sound pretty familiar.

Yes, we're back in *Blade Runner* and *RoboCop* territory once again. And once again the whizz-bang action scenes are anchored to some rather weightier philosophical concerns, such as how much we allow technology to take over our lives and how much our humanity (or lack thereof) can be defined by the body we inhabit. Thankfully, these themes are rich enough to merit yet more exploration.

It also doesn't hurt that director Rupert Sanders doesn't fall into the usual cyberpunk trap of dark, dystopian futures. The version of Hong Kong that Sanders gives us is a striking world of gigantic three-dimensional holographic adverts that fill the screen with rich, vivid colours.

However, this Hollywood remake's biggest strength is also the source of its main controversy – the casting of Johansson as the Major. While accusations of 'whitewashing' that have been thrown about have plenty of merit (not least because it highlights something that happens all too frequently in Hollywood), it's also impossible to

The many worlds of *Ghost in the Shell* on Blu-ray and DVD...

This version of *Ghost in the Shell* is only the latest in a long line of films, TV series and OVA (original video animation) based on Masamune Shirow's manga. If the US movie leaves you hungry for more but unsure of where to start, HCC is here to guide you through the different incarnations...

The obvious starting point is the 1995 Japanese animated feature film *Ghost in the Shell*. Directed by Mamoru Oshii, this bigscreen adaptation of Shirow's original manga series became a global hit, with James Cameron calling it 'a stunning work of speculative fiction.'

Oshii followed this up with 2004's sublime *Ghost in the Shell: Innocence*, a more complex continuation of the original film's themes that differed significantly from Shirow's own comic book sequel.

The original *Ghost in the Shell* film was subsequently re-released in 2008 as *Ghost in the Shell 2.0*, incorporating a rejigged soundtrack and new CG animation. If we were feeling kind we could say that the new CGI sequences have aged pretty badly, but in truth they already looked rather shoddy at the time of the film's release. Suffice to say, nobody was very impressed.



While all of that was happening on the bigscreen, the franchise had also made the jump to TV in 2002. The critically-acclaimed 26-episode animated series *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex* dialled back the clock to show what the Major and Section 9 were up to before the events of the films.

A second 26-episode season (*Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex 2nd GIG*) and a TV movie designed to wrap up ongoing story threads (*Solid State Society*) followed in 2005 and 2006. Cut-down OVA movie versions of the two seasons of the TV series were later released under the titles *The Laughing Man* and *Individual Eleven*, respectively.

The latest incarnation is 2013's *Ghost in the Shell: Arise*, a four-part OVA series that is once again set before the events of the original manga and film and effectively reboots the entire franchise.

A film follow-up to the *Arise* series, *Ghost in the Shell: The New Movie* hit Japanese cinemas in 2015.

The good news for fans is that all of the above are currently available on Blu-ray in the UK, with the exception of the two *Stand Alone Complex* series, which are only available here on DVD.

From the vivid colours that illuminate busy city streets to the intricate detailing in the augmented features of its enhanced inhabitants, the disc's 1080p picture never falters. Facial close-ups reveal every single imperfection, while shots such as the slow-motion image of the Major smashing through a window as she interrupts a terrorist attack (Chapter 2) are sharp and detailed enough for you to start counting the shards of glass.

Despite a handful of slightly murky shots, black levels are also very good and reveal plenty of near-dark detail. This strength is vital with low-lit sequences such as the showdown with the Spider Tank (Chapter 15).

Audio: The Blu-ray's Dolby Atmos soundtrack is another success. While action scenes naturally benefit from the expanded soundscape, the mix comes into its own as the camera prowls the urban landscape; surrounds are filled with the hustle and bustle of everyday life while the height layer gets to play around with the sound accompanying the giant holographic adverts that tower above. Meanwhile, vocals are precise, music is rich and well-balanced and low-end effects offer real depth.

Extras: Bonus features included on the Blu-ray are interesting and informative – the problem is there simply aren't enough of them. *Hard-Wired Humanity: Making Ghost in the Shell* (30 minutes) gives an overview of the production, with specific focus on the cast, production design, stunts and shooting locations. *Section 9: Cyber Defenders* (11 minutes) profiles the main characters. Finally, *Man & Machine: The Ghost Philosophy* (11 minutes) explores the themes the film and original manga tackle.



Takashi Kitano (above) plays Major's boss and the head of Section 9



deny that Johansson is perfectly suited to the role. As well as the athleticism and action chops she brought to the Marvel movies, she also brings an almost Kubrickian sense of isolation and vulnerability to her soulful cyborg.

Backing Johansson up is an excellent supporting cast that adds even more weight to the film. Pilou Asbæk's Batou and Juliet Binoche's Dr. Ouelet are the standouts, bringing some much-needed camaraderie and compassion to an otherwise cold and technology-obsessed narrative.

Providing you can overlook the rather generic plotting there's heaps to enjoy about this Hollywood take on *Ghost in the Shell*. It's just a pity that there wasn't as much work put into the film's 'ghost' as there was into its spectacular 'shell'.

Picture: In case you haven't already got the point from the comments made above, it's worth reiterating that *Ghost in the Shell* is an absolute stunner from a visual standpoint. Thankfully, this Blu-ray release succeeds in recreating the film's eye-popping imagery (shot using the Arri Alexa 65 camera) on your home cinema thanks to a superb 1.78:1 Full HD AVC encode.

HCC VERDICT

Ghost in the Shell

→ Paramount/Universal Pictures
→ All-region BD → £25

WE SAY: This flawed but enjoyable sci-fi flick delivers an eye-popping vision of the future on Blu-ray.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

Arcade Action

Bigscreen home entertainment isn't just about movies anymore. **Rik Henderson** checks out a videogame vying for time on your home cinema system...



Wipeout: Omega Collection

Sony Interactive Entertainment Europe → PS4 → £35

We're almost four years into the latest console generation yet we're still getting remastered versions of older games. But there are no complaints from this quarter because when the remastered titles are as accomplished as *Wipeout: Omega Collection*, they become a welcome addition to any library.

Sony Interactive's release brings together two PS3 games, plus one from the PS Vita handheld: *Wipeout HD*, *Fury* and *2048*. And while they aren't our favourite future racers in the 22-year-old series, they play as well today as they did more than five years ago.

The controls are no small part of that. *Wipeout* games have

always been tough – you are, after all, controlling a hover-car with the traction of a lard-covered eel. Manoeuvring yourself around the many courses is challenging enough, let alone overtaking other racers and avoiding their weaponry.

However, since the first game was released in 1995, the controls have been tweaked and reconfigured to present a more intuitive game. And with three of them in one, there's plenty of opportunity to hone your skills over a vast number of tracks. *Wipeout HD*, for

example, was essentially a remake of *Wipeout Pure* and *Pulse*, both released for the PSP handheld many moons ago. So you get those tracks, plus the ones the *Fury* DLC and *2048* brought to the table. That's a lot of sci-fi racing action right there.

More impressive still is how this latest collection is presented. If you have a PS4 Pro you get a game that runs in 4K and at 60 frames per second, which is a visual delight. As *Wipeout HD* had the honour of being one of the few games to achieve 1080p 60fps on the PS3, upping the ante to 4K is a logical and much-welcome step. Of course, standard PS4 owners get 1080p 60fps again, but even then it's been suitably pimped to the nth degree.

It also has an incredible soundtrack. The series has always been one part game, one part clubbing experience and this collection pulls no punches in rave-centric grunt. The Prodigy and Chemical Brothers return and the general, high-energy dance choons remind us why the original *Wipeout* felt so much more than just a game.



The Taisho Trilogy

Arrow Academy → Region B BD & R2 DVD → £60



After more than a decade in the wilderness Japanese director Suzuki Seijun returned in 1980 with what turned out to be the first of three experimental films that mixed the psychological with the supernatural and the surreal, all set during Japan's 'Taisho' era (1879-1926). While not particularly well known outside of Japan, this boxset can only help boost awareness and appreciation of the films – *Zigeunerweisen* (1980), *Kagero-Za* (1981) and *Yumeji* (1991) – with its attractive Full HD encodes, informative extras and supporting book of essays.



Psycho II

Arrow Video → Region B BD £20



While the very idea of making a sequel to Hitchcock's iconic thriller may seem to be a fool's errand, this smart and surprising 1983 effort proves a worthy follow-up. Making this Blu-ray

all the more enticing is the outstanding package Arrow has put together. As well as an excellent 1.85:1 encode with a choice of LPCM stereo or DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack, there's also a mountain of extras including a chat-track by writer Tom Holland, extensive new and archival interviews, a demo reel of Jerry Goldsmith's score and even the entire promotional EPK record Universal sent to radio stations back in the day.



J'accuse

BFI → Region B BD & R2 DVD £20



Described by its maker as 'the harrowing cry of the dead... of yesterday's war against the war of tomorrow,' Abel Gance's 1938 sound reimagining of his 1919 silent film of the same name remains a powerful piece of anti-war filmmaking. This restored BD holds up very well given the film's age, although newsreel footage (and shots re-used from the 1919 version) naturally exhibit far more wear and tear. Extras are a chat-track by film scholar Paul Cuff, a photo gallery (including pages from the original film programme) and 36-page booklet.





Well, that's one way to guarantee you'll never have to worry about red wine stains



All praise this gorgeous show

Stunning TV adaptation of Neil Gaiman's much-loved fantasy novel will leave you in raptures

→ AMERICAN GODS: COMPLETE SEASON ONE

Telling the story of a looming war between the old forgotten Gods of ancient religion and the modern deities of media and technology that have risen up to replace them, Neil Gaiman's award-winning 2001 fantasy novel has finally made the jump to the screen. But could a TV series (aired Stateside by network Starz) really capture the majesty, epic scope and baroque beauty of the beloved book?

In a word: yes. In the hands of producers Bryan Fuller and Michael Green, *American Gods* has emerged as one of the weirdest, most visually arresting and – more importantly – utterly compelling TV shows to come along since Fuller's previous cult favourites *Pushing Daisies* (2007–09) and *Hannibal* (2013–15). In fact, this initial eight-episode season of *American Gods* is even more experimental and daring than those earlier shows. The result is something truly unique with a dazzling aesthetic.

In addition to style, it has a narrative that you can seek your teeth into. Fuller and Green have triumphed by remaining faithful to Gaiman's source, but expanding and updating it in meaningful ways. The showrunners have also managed to pull together a superior cast. Ricky Whittle's Shadow Moon provides a

sympathetic everyman protagonist; Ian McShane twinkles as the mischievous Mr. Wednesday; Emily Browning brings unexpected life to Shadow's deceased wife Laura; and Gillian Anderson is an unexpected joy as new god Media (who always appears in the guise of famous personalities).

Enticing and unapologetically bizarre, *American Gods* isn't like anything else on TV. The slow-burn approach of the first few episodes may put some off, but keep the faith and you'll be rewarded.

Picture: Shifting aspect ratios between 1.78:1 and 2.40:1 (generally, but not always, dependent on the time frame of the given sequence) *American Gods*' 1080p imagery is always a pleasure (the show has broadcast in UHD in the UK on Amazon Prime Video). Bursting with pixel info (check out those slow-motion shots) and awash with bold colours, it impresses from the get-go, with only some minor banding holding it back from perfection.

Audio: DTS-HD MA 5.1 mixes for the 60-minute episodes do pretty much exactly what you'd expect from a TV series. Most of the action is focused on the front LCR spread, with the rears employed for sporadic atmospheric effect and to give the soundtrack a larger stage.

Extras: In addition to eight promo featurettes, this four-disc set includes the Comic Con panel in full and a look at the book's origins with Neil Gaiman.



Ian McShane also worked on the 2009 adaptation of Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*



HCC VERDICT

American Gods: Complete Season One

→ StudioCanal → Region B BD → £35

WE SAY: This brutal and beautiful fantasy series is tailor-made for binge-watching on Blu-ray

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★





A dream come true for fans

With its solid AV and excellent extras, this '80s flick is no Blu-ray nightmare

→ DREAMSCAPE

It may have opened in the same year as *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, but this 1984 sci-fi/fantasy/horror actually has far more in common with Christopher Nolan's 2010 hit *Inception* than with Wes Craven's similarly dream-themed slasher.

Dennis Quaid plays Alex Gardner, a psychic who is approached by former mentor Dr. Paul Novotny (Max von Sydow) and his colleague Dr. Jane DeVries (Kate Capshaw) to help them with a top-secret science project. The two scientists have developed a technique allowing one person to enter the dreams of another and intend to use it to help cure sleep disorders. However, the shady government agency funding the project has a very different plan, and before long Alex finds himself trapped in a life or death struggle in the nightmarish dreamscapes of the President of the United States...

Made on a very modest budget of just \$6million, *Dreamscape* never seems to have enough money to fully realise its central concept. That said, providing you can look past these shortcomings (with even the nightmarish Snakeman looking more goofy than terrifying these days), it's a fun 1980s fantasy romp that buoys up its intriguing premise with a surprisingly solid cast.

One thing that may disappoint some potential buyers is that this Blu-ray uses the US cut of the film that loses a brief bit of nudity that was left intact in the 'European' release. However, as it appears that the same edit has been used for every Blu-ray release the film has enjoyed around the world, presumably an HD master only exists for this version.



Picture: This Blu-ray's 1.85:1-framed encode is essentially a tale of two halves. Daylight exteriors and other brightly-lit scenes look very good, with the clarity of the 1080p image revealing plenty of detail and a natural colour palette. On the other hand, darker scenes don't fair as well, exhibiting a coarser grain structure that hinders definition.

Audio: The disc includes an LPCM presentation of the original stereo soundtrack, plus a DTS-HD MA 5.1 remix that still doesn't offer much in the way of rear effects or low-end enhancement. Maurice Jarre's rather enthusiastic synth score remains just as overbearing in both mixes.

Extras: Enjoyable goodies include a filmmakers' commentary; an interview with Dennis Quaid (15 mins); a retrospective *Making of...* doc (61 mins); a look at the creation of the film's special effects (23 mins); and an interview with producer Bruce Cohn Curtis and writer Chuck Russell (24 mins).



HCC VERDICT

Dreamscape

→ Second Sight → Region B BD
→ £20

WE SAY: Some excellent extras add plenty of value to this hi-def outing for an oft-forgotten 1984 fantasy.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

The Levelling

Peccadillo Pictures → Region B BD
£20



Set against the backdrop of the 2014 flooding of the Somerset Levels, writer-director Hope

Dickson Leach's striking debut feature stars *Game of Thrones*' Ellie Kendrick as a veterinary student who returns to her family farm for the first time in years after the death of her brother. What follows is a powerful study of grief and unspoken conflict that marks out Dickson Leach as an exciting new talent. On top of a suitably naturalistic (but still well realised) 2.40:1 1080p encode of the film, this hi-def platter also hosts a series of all-too-brief interviews.



The Age of Shadows

Thunderbird Releasing → Region B BD
£25



South Korean director Kim Jee-woon has one of the most eclectic filmographies going, taking in everything

from the horror of 2003's *A Tale of Two Sisters* to the 2013 Arnie action flick *The Last Stand*. His latest is a handsome period thriller about a police captain torn between doing his duty to his superiors or to his country during the Japanese occupation of Korea. The film looks great in 1080p, with the detailed encode really showcasing the lavish production design, while the Korean DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is pleasingly immersive. Sadly, there are no extras beyond a trailer.



The Graduate: 50th Anniversary Edition

StudioCanal → Region B BD
£25



UK label StudioCanal has pulled out all of the stops for this celebratory Blu-ray re-release of director

Mike Nichols' acclaimed comic-drama. Sourced from the same 4K restoration that was the basis for the 2016 Criterion Collection US release, the film looks absolutely spectacular. The disc is no slouch in the audio department either, offering both an LPCM mono track and a director-approved DTS-HD MA 5.1 remix. Bountiful bonus bits includes three chat-tracks (one in German!), plus numerous interviews and documentaries.



Pulse

Arrow Video → Region B BD & R2 DVD
£20



With its central idea of ghosts re-entering the world via the internet, it's easy to see Kiyoshi

Kurosawa's 2001 film *Pulse* (aka *Kairo*) as just another *Ringu* copycat. Doing so, however, would be to ignore the wider themes of isolation and ennui that sit at the core of the film's overwhelming sense of dread, and which lift *Pulse* well above your run-of-the-mill J-Horror shocker. As great as it is to have the film on Blu-ray, the HD master Arrow has been supplied with is pretty soft and sometimes struggles with the deliberately muted aesthetic. Best of the extras is a new 44-minute interview with Kurosawa.





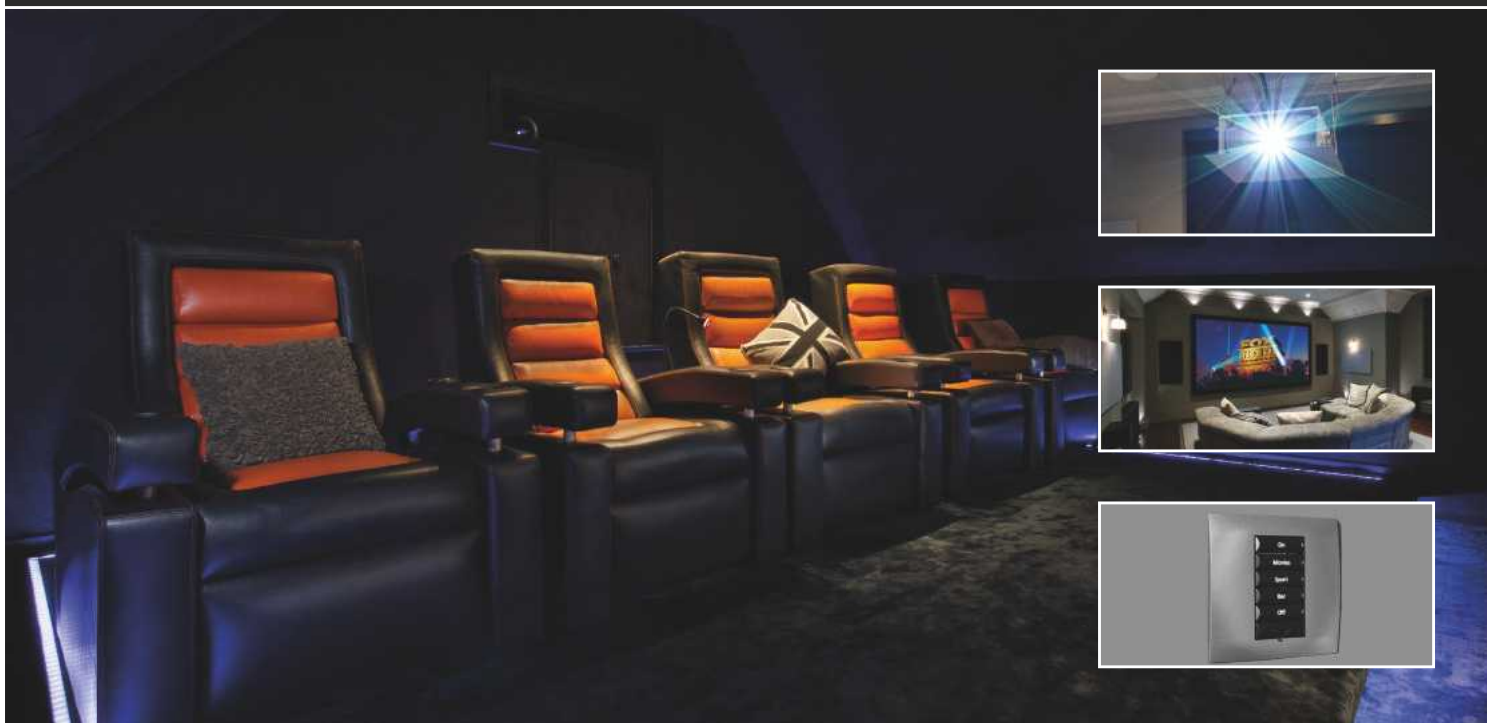
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A spa treatment like no other

You'll need a weekend break after visiting Gore Verbinski's overstuffed return to the horror genre

→ A CURE FOR WELLNESS

When the CEO of a New York financial firm has a mental breakdown on the eve of a massive company merger and checks himself into a sanatorium in the Swiss Alps, ambitious young executive Lockhart (Dane DeHaan) is dispatched to bring him back. Arriving at the remote mountaintop locale, Lockhart is denied access to the man he came to visit, but is introduced to the charming Dr. Volmer (Jason Isaacs) and meets several of the spa's elderly patients, none of whom show any desire to ever leave.

Involved in a freak car accident just outside its grounds, Lockhart is detained at the clinic while his broken leg heals. Investigating his new environs, he then befriends fellow patient Hannah (Mia Goth), and comes to realise that something is very wrong with the seemingly idyllic spa and its restorative water treatment.

Following in the wake of Guillermo del Toro's *Crimson Peak* (2015), Gore Verbinski's *A Cure for Wellness* is yet another gothic pastiche that isn't afraid to wear its influences on its sleeve. While it may be ostensibly set in the present day, the film's sinister clinic (established in an imposing castle) and the treatments its patients endure feel like leftovers from another age, and one that is more accommodating to gothic trappings that bring to mind such literary classics as *Dracula*, *Frankenstein* and *The Phantom of the Opera*.

Returning to the horror genre for the first time since 2002's *The Ring*, Verbinski again proves himself



a master at orchestrating scenes of almost unbearable horror (one piece of demented dentistry comes close to trumping the iconic scene from 1976's *Marathon Man*). However, as with his *Pirates of the Caribbean* trilogy and *The Lone Ranger*, the film's two-and-a-half-hour running time shows that he still hasn't grasped the idea of 'too much of a good thing.' A suggested treatment for this flick would be trimming it down by 30 minutes or so.

Picture: *A Cure for Wellness* displays the same cold, blue and green-tinted palette that Verbinski previously used for his *The Ring* remake. While this could have resulted in a rather flat and crushed image, Fox's accomplished AVC 1.78:1 Full HD encode replicates it perfectly and holds a wealth of fine object detail, even in shadows, that provides a pleasing sense of depth and volume. This BD has no trouble conjuring up breathtaking 1080p images – one instance being the striking IMAX-esque shot of the train rounding a bend that opens Chapter 2.

Audio: The Blu-ray's DTS-HD MA 7.1 soundtrack is a suitably restrained affair that forgoes largescale surround effects for the most part in favour of a more subtle, creepy ambience. Dialogue and music are perfectly presented.

Extras: Disappointing to say the least. All that the Blu-ray has to offer is a single deleted sequence, a four-minute featurette about the recording of the film's score, trailers, and a trio of brief meditation videos for you to chill out to. If you fancy learning something about how the film was made, you're out of luck.

HCC VERDICT

A Cure for Wellness

→ Twentieth Century Fox

→ Region B BD → £25

WE SAY: This weird and wacky gothic shocker looks sublime in 1080p, but the disc's extras are a real letdown.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

The Orchard End Murder

BFI Flipside → Region B BD & R2 DVD
£20



Having supported the likes of *Dead and Buried* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* in UK cinemas, writer-director Christian

Marnham's darkly comic short 1981 thriller now gets the chance to shine on its own. And shine it does – in an authentically rough and gritty sort of way – thanks to a new 2K restoration of the 35mm negative. Joining the 50-minute flick on Blu-ray are new interviews with Marnham and actors Tracy Hyde and David Wilkinson, plus *The Showman*, Marnham's 1970 doc about the wonderfully titled Wally Shufflebottom's Wild West Striptease Show.



Castle Keep

Indicator → All-region BD & R2 DVD
£23



One of the real joys of boutique labels pillaging the vaults of major studios are the more obscure gems

they unearth. Such is the case with this surreal, anti-authoritarian 1968 war film, which stars Burt Lancaster as the commander of a ragtag squad of US soldiers taking shelter in a Belgian castle in the run-up to the Battle of the Bulge. As usual, Indicator has put together an impressive Blu-ray package including a robust Full HD encode, a choice of LPCM mono and DTS-HD MA 4.0 audio and quality extras, including a 100-minute audio interview with Lancaster.



Lord of the Flies

The Criterion Collection → Region B BD
£28



This 1963 adaptation of William Golding's classic story of a group of unlucky schoolchildren stranded

on a deserted island may be a little rough around the edges, but this only adds to the quasi-documentary style adopted by director Peter Brook and cinematographer Tom Hollyman. The centrepiece of this Criterion Collection Blu-ray is a new 4K digital transfer of the film with an LPCM mono soundtrack that does the best it can with the limited source material. Extras include extracts from a reading of the novel by Golding and a commentary track.



The 5,000 Fingers of Dr. T.

Indicator → All-region BD & R2 DVD
£23



The only film written by Theodore Seuss Geisel (aka Dr. Seuss), this utterly bonkers and, it must be said,

occasionally nightmarish 1953 musical fantasy may have flopped on its original cinema release, but has gone on to find a more appreciative audience in recent years. While we'll never get to see the film in its original form before it was hacked around by producer Stanley Kramer, this Blu-ray is the next best thing, serving up a restored 1.37:1 Technicolor presentation of the theatrical release. Extras include a detailed chat-track.



Fake detective uncovers real laughs

Funnyman Julian Barratt's latest comic creation is a master of self-delusion and silliness

→ MINDHORN

There's more than a whiff of Alan Partridge about Richard Thorncroft (Julian Barratt), the washed-up actor who was once the Isle of Man's biggest star due to his leading role in the hit TV series *Mindhorn* (about a detective with a bionic eye who could literally 'see the truth'). Heck, Steve Coogan even produced the film and has a cameo role in it.

The movie's plot, which finds Thorncroft returning to the Isle of Man to aid the police in the hunt for a deluded killer who is convinced that Detective Mindhorn is a real person, isn't what you'd call particularly original either.

None of this really matters as *Mindhorn* makes up for any perceived lack of freshness by simply being extremely funny. Barratt and co-writer Simon Farnaby (who gets some of the film's biggest laughs playing Thorncroft's former stuntman) have crafted an infectiously silly 90 minutes of knockabout humour that proves impossible to resist. And after years of seeing the Isle of Man standing in for countless other locations on the bigscreen, it's rather sweet to see it 'playing' itself for a change – even if it does come at the cost of jokes about a 'limited gene pool' and the cringe-worthy Manx Day celebrations.

Picture: Kicking off with what appears to be a dodgy old VHS recording of the opening sequence from *Mindhorn* (the fictional TV series), *Mindhorn* (the film) doesn't exactly make the best first impression when it comes to picture quality.

Naturally, this state of affairs doesn't last long, and the Blu-ray soon reveals the true nature of its

Shoes off.
Eye-patch on.
Let's get to
work...



AVC 2.40:1-framed encode. While the look of the film rarely strives for anything beyond the reach of a TV drama, the actual 1080p presentation reveals well-defined textures, stable blacks and a healthy colour palette.

Audio: With the exception of a few bursts of gunfire, this DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 mix isn't especially dynamic. The major focus is on dialogue and in that regard it's a complete success. Just don't expect anything too exciting.

Extras: While it looks like StudioCanal's Blu-ray is loaded with extras, in truth the bulk of these are sub-two-minute video gags that were presumably used to promote the film online. Even the *Making of...* featurette only clocks in at around six minutes.

Exceptions to this are the full-length video for Richard Thorncroft's terrible pop ballad *You Can't Handcuff the Wind* and an enjoyable (and not entirely serious) commentary by Barratt and Farnaby.



HCC VERDICT

Mindhorn

→ StudioCanal → Region B BD
→ £23

WE SAY: This farce won't set pulses racing as a Blu-ray, but that's not to say the film itself isn't a lot of fun.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★



Stuck between The Rock and a hard case



And we're under starter's orders

Vin Diesel and crew continue to wreak heavy metal havoc in this over-the-top actioner



It's this sort of thing that helped the movie's budget reach \$250m

→ THE FATE OF THE FURIOUS

From its tortuous attempt to incorporate an 'eight' sound into its title to its laboured bid to shoe-horn in an old-school race and its truly bonkers finale, this eighth instalment of *The Fast And The Furious* franchise sometimes feels like it's trying too hard. Fortunately, though, some super-slick, energetic and spectacle-driven direction from F. Gary Gray keeps your pulse rate high, while the cast are now so comfortable in their characters that they manage to inject oodles of charm into proceedings.

Picture: *F&F 8*'s all-important visual pyrotechnics are tailor-made for 4K HDR. The latter, in particular, brings the movie's stunning cars into your viewing room in a riot of gleaming metal, dazzling headlights and 'bold' paint choices.

Universal's disc offers both HDR 10 and Dolby Vision playback. As with *Despicable Me 1* and 2, DV does improve the viewing experience. Colours clearly have more range and subtler toning, making many shots richer in detail and more three-dimensional. That said,

the DV transfer did cause black colours to become distractingly elevated on a resident LG OLED TV.

Both the encodes feature superior sharpness and texture over the Full HD Blu-ray – so much so that it highlights a few sub-4K digital effects shots in the film's latter stages. Otherwise, this looks fine.

Audio: *F&F 8*'s largescale DTS:X mix works as hard as the visuals to cover up some of the film's dafter plot points, providing a ceaseless barrage of aggressively steered effects, with car engines revving and roaring so hard that you'll think you've got your head stuck under the bonnet. A boisterous LFE channel gives solid weight to the musical tracks that accompany key action scenes. Very enjoyable.

Extras: The only extra on the 4K platter is a commentary by Gray, who is a passionate speaker, but often falls into the trap of just describing the action. The accompanying all-region Blu-ray contains a collection of mostly short featurettes – *All About Stunts* is the most informative. Two extended fight sequences offer little extra.



HCC VERDICT

The Fate of the Furious

→ Universal Studios → Ultra HD BD & All-region BD → £29 (US Import)

WE SAY: Glorious 4K HDR visuals and enormous soundtrack – *F&F 8* ticks over nicely on UHD Blu.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★



Choose life... all over again

Trainspotting's crazy quartet get a fitting send off in this long-awaited sequel

→ T2 TRAINSPOTTING

It's been 21 years since *Trainspotting* cemented the reputation of director Danny Boyle and made leading man Ewan McGregor a star. Now we get a sequel, and the lengthy gap between instalments certainly works in its favour – the passage of time giving this eventual reunion of *Trainspotting's* four major players (Renton, Sick Boy, Spud and Begbie) plenty of narrative scope and tension.

The story (based in part on Irvine Welsh's own sequel novel *Porno*) is an expected seedy mix of drug use, prostitutes and – again – stolen money, although the whole production doesn't quite have the same feeling of raw power as its 1996 predecessor. That's not to say it isn't rewarding; stepping back into Boyle's Edinburgh underbelly, in the company of a first-rate cast, evokes nostalgia for a time when everyone had that 'Choose life...' poster on their wall and no one had heard the term 'cinematic universe'. *T2: Trainspotting* also provides a more fitting end to a story that you may have felt was left hanging in the original flick.

Picture: Presumably an upscale of the film's 2K DI, itself made up of sub-4K resolution digital photography, this doesn't quite scream 'Ultra HD Blu-ray' when it comes to pure sharpness (and isn't immune to some noise), but it's well delineated and crisper than in 1080p guise. Colour and HDR grading are more obvious differences, however, with more intensity and range to hues, and 'pop' to specific bright elements. Scenes, be they external or internal, therefore have a greater sense of realism.



Older but not necessarily wiser

HCC VERDICT

T2 Trainspotting

→ Sony Pictures → Ultra HD BD & All-region BD → £30

WE SAY: The boys are back in 'toun' for one last misadventure on a solid Ultra HD release.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

Audio: 4K system owners get an upgrade here, with Sony providing a Dolby Atmos mix (rather than 5.1 DTS-HD MA) as UHD accompaniment. It's a robust track, too: loud, dynamic, bass-rich and with good use of the surround and height layers to realise its varied locations, although the latter doesn't enjoy many scene-stealing moments.

Extras: Worthwhile extra features are all found on the Full HD Blu-ray. These are a commentary track by Danny Boyle and writer John Hodge; a 25-minute chat with Boyle and the principle cast (*20 Years in the Making...*); around half-an-hour of deleted scenes; and a short video about recovering addicts taking up sport.

The LEGO Batman Movie

Warner Bros. → Ultra HD BD & All-region BD → £35



Not all will take to the wry humour and LEGO animation of Warner's superhero 'toon, but this is a 4K HDR encode that deserves to be seen. Swathes of colour and bright image peaks are the order of

the day, showcasing exactly what wide colour grading and ramped-up contrast can achieve (in one style, anyway). In truth, 4K detailing is less impressive but your eyes will be drawn to the vibrant primary colours elsewhere. A director/crew commentary makes it to the UHD platter; Dolby Atmos is offered, but note the disc defaults to a DTS-HD MA variant.

★★★★★

Rise of the Planet of the Apes

Twentieth Century Fox → Ultra HD BD & All-region BD → £24



From a slow start, *Rise...* delivers a rousing first instalment of the surprisingly powerful *Planet Of The Apes*

reboot trilogy. The UHD BD release, though, is hit-and-miss. HDR makes exteriors look brighter and more natural, defines space better in the early lab sequences, and the repeated thematic use of extreme light contrasts has more impact too. However, sometimes the colour work looks forced in HDR, and the 4K disc often suffers with more noise than the HD version. The soundmix, while impressive, remains DTS-HD 5.1.

★★★★★

Dawn of the Planet of the Apes

Twentieth Century Fox → Ultra HD BD & All-region BD → £24



Dawn... is a better movie and claims a much better 4K transfer than *Rise...* Detailing and

sharpness levels are substantially boosted versus the HD Blu, while the use of more exterior locations gives scope for HDR's talents to shine. There's a natural conjunction between the 4K disc's HDR and wide colour gamut attributes, producing pleasing skin and landscape tones. A few dark scenes exhibit raised black levels, leaving them looking grey and noisy. Audio is DTS-HD 7.1, even though Atmos was used theatrically.

★★★★★



Step inside a towering 4K inferno

A new soundmix, reggraded visuals and the 3D BD make for a criminally good release

→ DREDD

Look up cult film in the dictionary, and you'll find Karl Urban's masked Judge Dredd staring back at you. Probably.

Urban and director Pete Travis's (almost) unrelentingly bleak take on the iconic comic book character pays off beautifully, delivering a grimy, nasty antidote to the relentless slickness of most of the past decade's other superhero takes. Superb. **Picture:** *Dredd* doesn't strike you as a great choice for the 4K Blu-ray treatment. It was only mastered to a 2K digital intermediate, and its style – except for the amped SLO-MO drug sequences – is deliberately drab and grubby. However, while only *Dredd*'s biggest fans would call the film's 4K HDR image 'reference status', it certainly delivers a worthwhile improvement over the regular Blu-ray.

SLO-MO sequences look even more narcotically spectacular, with a deliberately over-wrought contrast and over-saturated colours. And even the bleak photography around Mega-City and its locked-down apartment block feels 'opened up' by the expanded light range, giving new insight into the brilliant set design and stark use of colour.

The extra 4K sharpness does highlight some quite heavy colour noise, but general grain and noise issues appear actually reduced.

Audio: *Dredd*'s famously aggressive soundmix has been turned up to 11 by this 4K Blu-ray's new Dolby Atmos track. Bass levels from the electronic score are profound, while every shot from every gun – of which there are, of course, many – is forthright and meaty. There's effective height to the sound, too,



DISC
OF THE
MONTH

And that, kids, is why you should never ever play with fireworks!

giving a better sense of scale to the apartment block's vertical dimensions and affording the sound creators more scope for adding dynamic transitions to the already ultra-potent mix.

Extras: No new extras have appeared for *Dredd*'s 4K release. However, the bonus features housed on the Region A-locked BD are still excellent, covering everything from the film's visual effects to its comic book history in exemplary detail, with lots of access to key players and behind-the-scenes assets.

Given that some of the extras talk about the process of filming *Dredd* in 3D, it's refreshing to find that the included Blu-ray carries the 3D version, even though this isn't highlighted on the packaging.

HCC VERDICT

Dredd

→ Lionsgate → Ultra HD BD & Region A BD → £17 (US Import)

WE SAY: Thanks to its spruced-up visuals and Atmos audio mix, this is the definitive *Dredd* experience.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

xXx: Return of Xander Cage

Paramount/Universal Pictures
Ultra HD BD & All-region BD → £40



Vin Diesel finds time between driving his *Fast & Furious* franchise forward to revisit an earlier action series, and the result is some perfectly acceptable, brainless, action fun. On UHD Blu-ray, the

2.40:1 image isn't a work of art – there are sharper, more impactful encodes around – but it remains an improvement on the previous Blu-ray release, with HDR adding an extra sense of image depth. The Dolby Atmos soundmix is more of a sure-fire hit; it's consistently active, and chucks plenty up high to deliver an expansive soundfield.

Hidden Figures

Twentieth Century Fox → Ultra HD BD & Region B BD → £30



Theodore Melfi's feelgood historical drama concerning female African American maths

experts working at NASA in the 1960s mixes 35mm film elements with 16mm and archival footage, yet manages to present a stable 4K HDR whole. An obvious benefit of the HDR grading is an improved handling of the movie's sometimes darkly-lit interiors, while external day-lit shots can appear wonderfully lush, with refined grain. The 4K disc offers the director's commentary as its only extra, alongside a subdued DTS-HD MA 7.1 soundmix.

Split

Universal Pictures → Ultra HD BD & All-region BD → £40



M. Night Shyamalan's largely enjoyable psychological horror (with a fan-pleasing sting in its tale) also

makes for a solid 4K release, and one that, for once, isn't yet available in the US. It's never the most colourful of movies (the subdued palette fits the subject matter perfectly), but everything here seems better realised, be it image sharpness, dynamic range or colour subtlety. Audio (as on the Full HD disc) is a well-balanced, atmospheric DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix. Extras (including nearly half-an-hour of deleted scenes) all reside with the 1080p movie.





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Collecting...

Films based on TV

With the bigscreen *Power Rangers* reboot rampaging into home cinemas this month, **Team HCC** tunes in to 10 more movies adapted from television series...

THE BRADY BUNCH MOVIE

You don't have to be familiar with the original 1970s US sitcom to get a kick out of this self-aware 1995 satire, which places the clean-cut Brady family (retro fashions, morals and all) in the 1990s and mines the ensuing culture clash for laughs. A hit at the box office, the film spawned a fun follow-up (*A Very Brady Sequel*) in 1996. Just be sure to steer well clear of the 2002 TV movie, *The Brady Bunch in the White House*, which lacks the wit, charm and smarts of the two earlier films.

Get it: Paramount has all but given up on back catalogue Blu-ray releases, so it's no surprise that neither *The Brady Bunch Movie* or its sequels have been released on the format. This means we're stuck with the old barebones DVDs for the foreseeable future.



The queue for a *Brady Bunch* BD keeps on growing...



THE FUGITIVE

Harrison Ford searches for an elusive one-armed man and tries to clear his name in this gripping 1993 thriller that boils down the 120(!) episodes of the original 1960s show into a taut two hours. Sequel *U. S. Marshals* (with Tommy Lee Jones reprising his role) is a fun ride, too.

Get it: In the UK your sole option is an early (2006) Blu-ray release with lossy Dolby Digital and an MPEG-2 encode. There's a more recent, technically superior 20th Anniversary Edition from the US that's region-free.



MIAMI VICE

Michael Mann, a showrunner on the 1980s TV series, brought Detectives Crockett and Tubbs to cinema screens in 2006 in a richly-detailed, complex drug-running thriller that's a perfect partner to his earlier cop flick *Heat*. Brooding and beautiful in a way the telly show wasn't.

Get it: The 2008 UK Blu-ray is packed with extras and offers gun-heavy DTS-HD 5.1 audio, but it's the all-region US release that houses a longer Director's Cut.



SERENITY

Indifference on the part of Fox saw Joss Whedon's smart and snappy sci-fi series *Firefly* (2002) cancelled after just 11 episodes were aired. However, the fanbase that eventually grew up around the show was rewarded in 2005 with this spectacular bigscreen follow-up. *Gao guhn!*

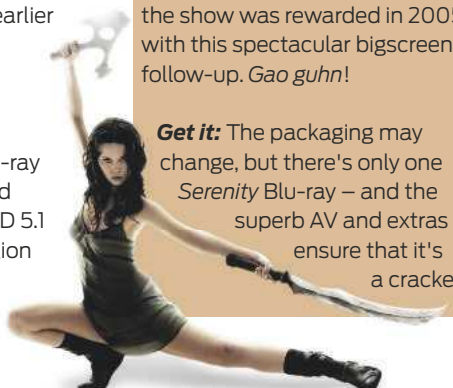
Get it: The packaging may change, but there's only one *Serenity* Blu-ray – and the superb AV and extras ensure that it's a cracker.



NAKED GUN 2½

The genius 1982 cop spoof show *Police Squad!* was cancelled after just six episodes – thankfully it was reborn in the *Naked Gun* film series. While there's not much to pick between the first two movies in the trilogy, we reckon *2½* (...*The Smell of Fear*) just edges it. Quick-paced, and packed with jokes both subtle and as obvious as a punch in the face, it's a giant of the genre.

Get it: The standalone BD releases for all three movies aren't AV heavyweights. A trilogy pack has just been released Stateside.





TRAFFIC

Steve Soderbergh based this war on drugs drama (2000) on a Bafta award-winning six-part UK series that aired in 1989. The movie belies its TV ancestry with its interwoven plotlines focusing on three separate stories, but Soderbergh brings it all together with typical panache.

Get it: *Traffic* has never been released on UK Blu-ray, so if you want an upgrade over the DVD you can choose from Universal's 2010 all-region US platter or a newer Region A Criterion Collection release that is absolutely loaded with extra features.



SOUTH PARK: BIGGER, LONGER & UNCUT

A pop culture phenomenon from the day its first episode aired in 1997, it was inevitable that this controversial cartoon would make the leap to the silver screen. What nobody predicted was that the 1999 film would turn out to be a ruthlessly funny musical about censorship and freedom of speech, and would go on to win an Oscar for Best Original Song.

Get it: With no UK release on the cards, simply import the all-region US platter, which includes a new chat track from co-creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone.



STAR TREK II: THE WRATH OF KHAN

The cult sci-fi series ran for three years in the late 1960s, before spawning a movie franchise a decade later. 1979's *The Motion Picture* failed to adapt well to the longer medium, but sequel *The Wrath of Khan* was much better, helped by a brilliant baddie and a sense of verve and vibrancy missing from its predecessor. Still every Trekker's favourite.

Get it: First released on Blu-ray in 2009 (to coincide with the *Star Trek* reboot), but since followed by a Director's Cut edition (with funky sleeve art) to mark the series' 50th Anniversary.



21 JUMP STREET

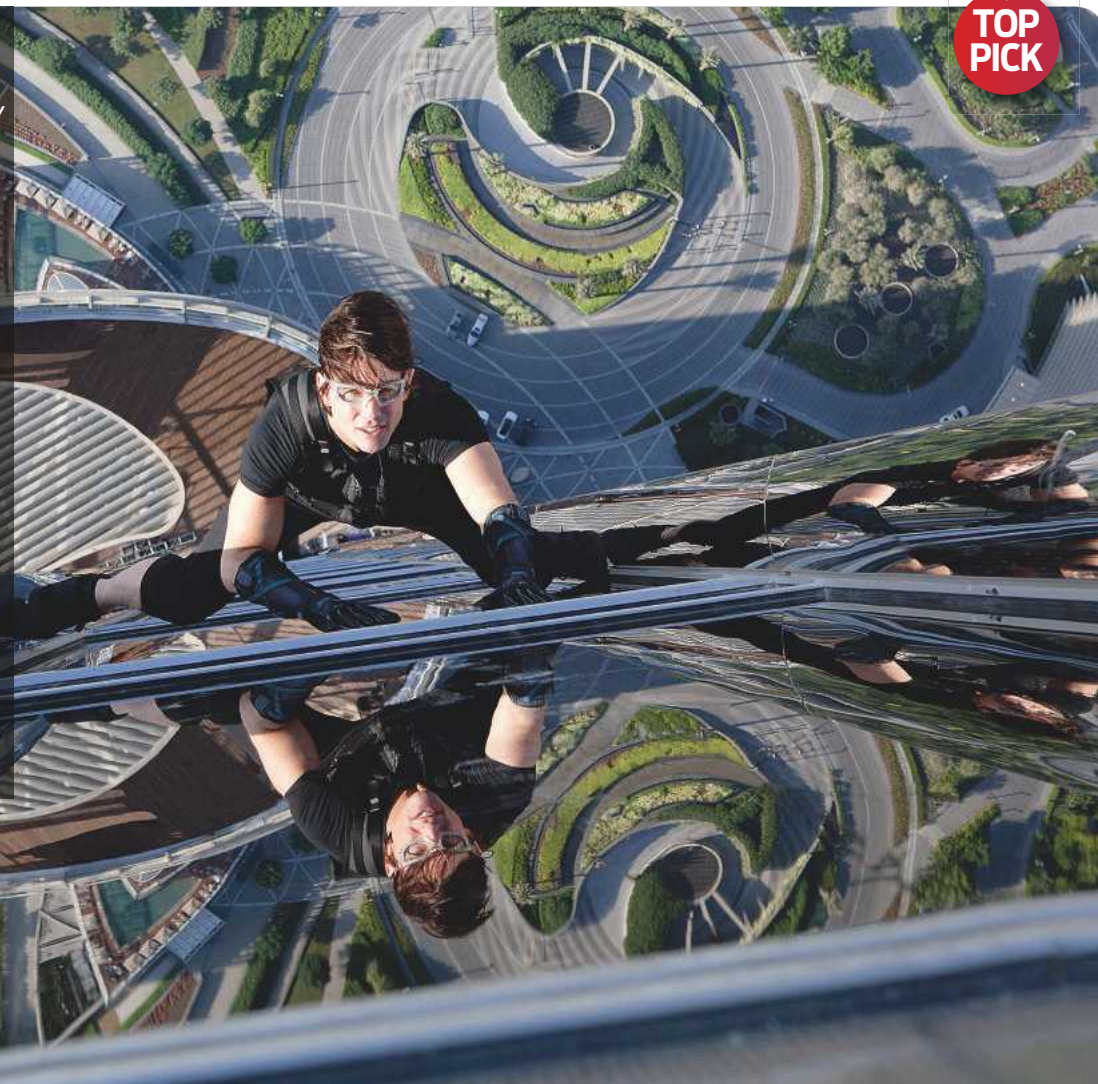
Jonah Hill and Channing Tatum star in a playful 2012 comedy based on the daft 1980s Johnny Depp TV show about undercover cops who can pass as teenagers. Far smarter than it first appears, *21 Jump Street* (the film) works both as a superior teen movie and a parody of the entire genre – with the added bonus of some explosive action sequences to wake up your subwoofer.

Get it: Why bother with just *21 Jump Street*? Pick up a Blu-ray double-pack containing the equally enjoyable sequel (2014's *22 Jump Street*) for little more than a fiver.

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE – GHOST PROTOCOL

Under the guidance of leading man/producer Tom Cruise, *Mission: Impossible* has been transformed from a fondly-remembered '60s spy series into one of Hollywood's biggest action franchises. It's one of the most spectacular too, with Cruise tackling bigger and crazier stunts in each instalment. While nearly all of the films are great fun (the exception being John Woo's overblown *Mission: Impossible II*, released in 2000), the high point is 2011's *Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol*, which sees Cruise hanging outside The Burj Khalifa tower in one vertigo-inducing set-piece.

Get it: A Blu-ray boxset of all five films is available for less than £20. However, true fans will want to track down the 'Limited Edition' three-disc US...*Ghost Protocol* BD.



TOP PICK

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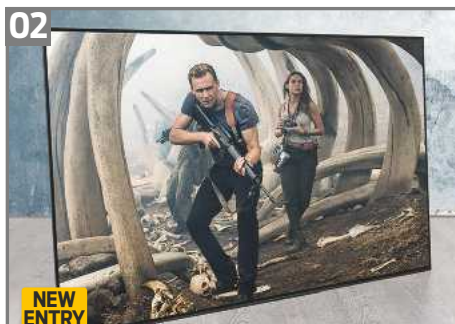
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Acceptable	★★★☆☆
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Dire	★★★☆☆

All prices quoted are approximate and may have changed

TOP 10 Televisions

**Sony KD-65ZD9** → £3,500 ★★★★★

Sony finished 2016 on a high with this full-array LED Bravia (with advanced local dimming tech) that claims a 1,800-nit peak brightness. Cinematic, sublime pictures – and Dolby Vision support is a firmware update away. HCC #267



NEW ENTRY

Sony KD-55A1 → £3,500 ★★★★★

Another Sony set due a Dolby Vision upgrade later this year, this 55in OLED dazzles with its image quality (including superb motion processing), hidden Acoustic Surface speaker technology and eye-catching styling. HCC #275

**LG OLED65E7**

→ £5,000 ★★★★★

3D playback is dropped, but the E7 offers welcome picture improvements over last year's E6, particularly brightness and near-black talents. Supports Dolby Vision. HCC #274

**Panasonic TX-65DX902**

→ £2,300 ★★★★★

This HDR-capable 65-incher wears its Ultra HD Premium badge with pride, and employs a full-array backlight to take control of its impressive luminance talents. Imagery is excellent. HCC #259

**Philips 55POS901F**

→ £2,800 ★★★★★

Philips enters the OLED arena with a screen that stands out courtesy of its alluring performance and Ambilight. But it lacks the smart skills and 3D playback of some rivals. HCC #270

**Samsung QE65Q9F**

→ £4,900 ★★★★★

This premium 'QLED' screen outguns rivals when it comes to brightness and visual impact. Routinely stunning, but edge LED lighting has some niggles. Supports Samsung's HDR 10+ format. HCC #273

**Sony KD-55XE9005**

→ £1,700 ★★★★★

Sony brings direct LED illumination to the 55in arena. Still not an absolute HDR knockout (local dimming isn't foolproof) but generally this is a good-looking set for the AV everyman. HCC #272



NEW ENTRY

Samsung UE55MU9000

→ £1,750 ★★★★★

Below Samsung's QLED models, this edge LED set still majors on a bright, colour-rich HDR-friendly performance. Tempting price, but backlight foibles are a distraction in a dark room. HCC #275

**Sony KD-55XE9305**

→ £2,400 ★★★★★

This Android 4K LED model hits the highs when it comes to brightness and colour impact, leading to some stellar HDR visuals. Yet the edge LED lighting shows some flaws. HCC #271

**Hisense 75M7900**

→ £2,500 ★★★★★

A massive 75in LED set at a bargain price from the Chinese corp. The appeal is its largescreen 4K playback: a lack of innate brightness and colour subtlety hampers HDR performance. HCC #267

TOP 5 Blu-ray movies

**Kong: Skull Island**

Setting up a future *Godzilla vs Kong* flick, this monster movie is heaps of fun, and hits home cinemas on a masterful Blu-ray with startling visuals, expansive Dolby Atmos audio and a good selection of extras.

★★★★★

**Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them [Ultra HD Blu-ray]**

Warner's lively Harry Potter spin-off/prequel conjures up spellbinding 4K HDR imagery, accompanied by a playful Atmos audio mix.

★★★★★

**Hacksaw Ridge**

Mel Gibson's enthralling real-life World War 2 story explodes onto Blu-ray with dazzlingly detailed 2.40:1 Full HD visuals and one of the most impactful Dolby Atmos soundtracks you'll ever hear. The extras are well worth a look, too.

★★★★★

**Logan [Ultra HD Blu-ray]**

A superhero movie with a harder edge than most, *Logan* is the best entry in the X-Men franchise yet. Fox's 4K release offers colour and 'Noir' versions, both impressive in different ways.

★★★★★

**The LEGO Batman Movie**

Joyful, satirical and packed with fan-pleasing references, this toytastic 'toon is hard to beat. Colourful, sharp visuals, Dolby Atmos sonics and decent extras, including an informative director's commentary.

★★★★★

TOP 10 Blu-rays

01



Oppo UDP-203 → £650 ★★★★★

Oppo refreshes its player hardware with a superb universal design with Ultra HD playback (including Dolby Vision via firmware update). Packed with user adjustments and connectivity. No apps or Darbee processing, though. HCC #269

02



Oppo UDP-205 → £1,400 ★★★★★

This pricey, peerless UHD deck flaunts universal disc playback, asynchronous USB input, headphone amp and balanced stereo outs amongst its audiophile features. One for musos. HCC #274

03



Sony UBP-X800 → £400 ★★★★★

Sony embraces UHD Blu-ray with a full-width, sturdy design that'll also spin DVD-A and SACD platters. A great all-rounder, but no current Dolby Vision support or word on an update. HCC #274

04



Panasonic DMP-UB900 → £600 ★★★★★

The Ultra HD Blu-ray format got an inspiring debut in Panasonic's multi-talented deck that offers a sterling picture performance, 4K-enabled VOD apps and analogue audio outs. No DV. HCC #259

05



Panasonic DMP-UB700 → £300 ★★★★★

Shorn of some of the audiophile niceties of the UB900 (including multichannel analogue outputs), but still a safe pair of hands with your 4K BDs. And at a bargain price. HCC #270

06



Arcam FMJ UDP411 → £1,200 ★★★★★

Pristine visuals – including upscaled SD – and a classy sonic performance grant this Arcam instant appeal. The design and build is commensurate with the premium price tag. HCC #244

07



Panasonic DMP-UB300 → £240 ★★★★★

Great 4K imagery from this bargain deck, but you might prefer to up your budget for the UB700 – no split HDMI, optical/coaxial or Wi-Fi connections here. Half-size design for an easy install. HCC #272

08



Samsung UBD-K8500 → £270 ★★★★★

Debut Ultra HD Blu-ray player that finds fans courtesy of its sensible price point (now even lower), connected smarts and eye-catching visuals. Build quality is a little uninspiring. HCC #260

09



LG BP556 → £85 ★★★★★

LG's top-of-the-line(!) Full HD disc-spinner is actually a budget offering. Design is a bit garish, but the addition of multiroom streaming, some smart apps and file playback sweeten the deal. HCC #266

10



Samsung UBD-M9500 → £350 ★★★★★

Second-gen 4K player that adds features (mobile BD streaming, 360-degree image support) but removes 3D playback capability. As before, the chassis is curved. UHD discs look pin-sharp. HCC #275

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TOP 10 Projectors



01 Sony VPL-VW550ES → £9,000 ★★★★★

For its top-range domestic SXRD beamer, Sony introduces an HDR Contrast tool that proves useful in fine-tuning its UHD Blu-ray performance. Excels with standard BD content and setup flexibility, too. HCC #269



02 JVC DLA-X7000 → £5,700 ★★★★★

With contrast and brightness improvements over the more affordable DLA-X5000, this is a great bigscreen option, although its SDR playback impresses more than HDR. HCC #259



03 Sony VPL-HW45ES

→ £1,850 ★★★★★

The most affordable model in Sony's home cinema range, the Full HD-resolution 45ES features excellent light management for a routinely cinematic image. Great value. HCC #263



04 Epson EH-TW6700

→ £1,300 ★★★★★

HDR and 4K scaling are off the menu, leaving this mid-range model to concentrate on cinematic HD images. Bright, crisp performance, plenty of tweaks, but no 12V trigger. HCC #271



05 Acer V9800

→ £4,000 ★★★★★

This 4K DLP offers wonderful clarity and bright HDR peaks via its 2,200 Lumens lamp. Black levels aren't the best, but the price here feels about right for a debut technology. HCC #272



06 Epson EH-TW9300

→ £3,000 ★★★★★

Epson brings HDR playback and 4K up-rezzing to an agreeable price tag. Colourful and well-contrasted visuals, but don't expect an HDR knockout. HCC #266



07 ViewSonic Pro7827HD

→ £600 ★★★★★

Pictures impress from this single-chip DLP budget option that carries a third HDMI input designed for smart streaming sticks. Includes ISF calibration. 3D glasses are an optional extra. HCC #261



08 Epson EH-TW7300

→ £2,200 ★★★★★

Similar performance traits to its bigger EH-TW9300 sibling, but with reductions in max brightness (and claimed contrast). Currently the most affordable HDR model around. HCC #269



09 Optoma GT5000

→ £1,000 ★★★★★

Ultra short-throw PJ with healthy brightness that makes sense for regular living rooms where a traditional install isn't possible. Casts Full HD images from just 30cm. HCC #261



10 BenQ W2000

→ £800 ★★★★★

Average black-level performance limits this model's all-round appeal, but elsewhere this Full HD DLP budget PJ catches the eye with its calibration options and detailed visuals. HCC #257

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TOP 10 Speakers



01 **Monitor Audio Gold 300AV** →£7,150 ★★★★★
MA revamps its Gold Series and we pay serious attention. This big-ticket package excels across the frequency range, offers exquisite design and packs setup flexibility via the dipole/monopole FX surrounds. *HCC #251*



02 **Q Acoustics 3000 5.1 Cinema Pack** →£700 ★★★★★
A superior compact package with driver improvements over the previous 2000i series. The two-way cabinets and dual-driver sub combine to offer impressive audio for the money. *HCC #247*



03 **KEF R Series 7.1**
→£6,500 ★★★★★
A 7.1 set mixing dipolar and direct surrounds, this package takes its cues from KEF's Blade and offers faultless, largescale home cinema sonics. *HCC #217*



04 **Monitor Audio Bronze B5 AV**
→£1,500 ★★★★★
Like their Gold siblings, these feature switchable surround speakers and MA's C-CAM drivers. Smaller in stature and output, but eminently more affordable. *HCC #254*



05 **ATC HTS7 5.1**
→£3,500 ★★★★★
Brit brand ATC rejigs the driver tech and neutral sound of its SCM range into a wall-mountable, flexible system perfect for discreet AV setups. *HCC #275*



06 **ELAC Debut 5.1.2**
→£1,950 ★★★★★
Well-priced floorstanding Atmos system that manages to balance subtlety and precision with an exciting delivery. Subwoofer includes app-based room EQ. *HCC #262*



07 **DALI Opticon 5.1**
→£3,200 ★★★★★
The Opticons employ driver designs from DALI's high-end models, and showcase a talent for involving music presentation and thrilling home cinema. *HCC #260*



08 **Polk Signature Series 5.1**
→£1,450 ★★★★★
Largescale performance from a well-priced floorstanding system with slimmed-down centre enclosure. Upfront and boisterous sound; a great entertainer. *HCC #273*



09 **Dynaudio Emit 5.1**
→£3,200 ★★★★★
Entry-level for Dynaudio – still a hefty chunk for a 5.1 array. The money gets you a wonderfully natural and cohesive soundstage and superb build quality. *HCC #263*



10 **Wharfedale DX-1SE**
→£400 ★★★★★
Delightfully compact 5.1 package (although with two-way satellite speakers) that blends a tidy design with crisp surround sonics at a very tempting price. *HCC #267*

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Photo courtesy of UK Home Cinemas

TOP 10 Subwoofers



01 SVS SB-2000 → £600 ★★★★★

This follow up to the SB-1000 offers immense value for money. A mid-sized woofer that imbibes Blu-rays with quick, taut and potent LFE, it's a perfect introduction to what a truly good sub can accomplish. *HCC #233*



02 REL No.25 → £6,500 ★★★★★

REL celebrates its 25th anniversary in style with this 15in/1,000W premium concoction that exhibits exhilarating speed and nuance down to serious depths. Big, but beautiful. *HCC #271*



03 JL Audio Fathom f212v2

→ £6,500 ★★★★★

A second outing for JL's 2 x 12in monster, with an increase in power (3,600W) and room EQ improvements among the changes. Sounds as good as you'd imagine. *HCC #261*



04 SVS SB16-Ultra

→ £2,500 ★★★★★

A 16in driver and 1,500W amp combine to give SVS's flagship sealed sub real appeal. Goes low but remains tight and fast. App-assisted EQ and operation. *HCC #270*



05 REL S/3 SHO

→ £1,450 ★★★★★

The 10in, 400W S/3 is part of REL's revamped 'Super High Output' Serie S line. Excellent speed, control and a scale bigger than you might expect. *HCC #264*



06 BK Electronics P12-300SB-DF

→ £475 ★★★★★

Bass heads can get outrageous value for money in the shape of BK's overperforming 12in sub. A front-firing model is also offered. *HCC #247*



07 Eclipse TD520SW

→ £3,000 ★★★★★

This twin 8in woofer, driven by ICEpower amplification, aims for ultimate speed and tone – and succeeds. Worth every penny of its asking price. *HCC #249*



08 GoldenEar SuperSub X

→ £1,450 ★★★★★

Four drivers squeezed into a relatively compact design and given plenty of push from a 1,400W amp. Standout traits are impact and depth. *HCC #272*



09 SVS PC-2000

→ £800 ★★★★★

The cylinder construction means this 12in, 500W design can boast a large cabinet but a relatively small footprint. Good value with weighty, slamming bass. *HCC #267*



10 Artison Nano 1

→ £800 ★★★★★

Artison's media room-friendly Nano 1 tucks twin 6.5in drivers into its compact frame. Bass extension isn't the deepest, but this is tight, fast and fun. *HCC #253*

TOP 5 Console games



Call of Duty: Infinite Warfare

The sci-fi trappings may upset COD purists, but this is one of the series' best entries in years. The action-packed single-player campaign is a blast; multiplayer extends the fun. ★★★★★



Resident Evil 7: Biohazard

Moving from the familiar third-person perspective to a first-person view was always going to be a risk, but it pays off here with a terrifying return to the series' roots. PS4 Pro owners get enhanced resolution visuals. ★★★★★



Prey

Bethesda's FPS (and reboot of the popular 2006 title) refreshes the genre with inanimate-object-mimicking monsters, and offers plenty of gameplay variety. Good-looking, but 4K is limited to PC-based setups. ★★★★★



Horizon Zero Dawn

Tomb Raider meets Zelda in this PS4-exclusive action-adventure pitting humans against massive mechanical beasts. Excellent gameplay, and the 4K visuals are perhaps the best reason yet to upgrade to a PS4 Pro. ★★★★★



Injustice 2

Brilliant follow up to the 2013 superhero beat-'em-up classic, letting you dole out a good kicking to the bad guys while playing as DC Comics legends. Advanced resolution via PS4, plus HDR, too. ★★★★★

TOP 10 Accessories



01 KEF R50 → £600 ★★★★★

KEF's Dolby Atmos-enabled reflective modules are a smart choice to beef up a system. Using the company's Uni-Q point source drivers pays dividends, enabling full-range sonics that reach deep into your cinema room. First-rate build. *HCC #252*



03



Amazon Echo Dot

→ £50 ★★★★★

Less impressive as a standalone speaker than its larger sibling, but a third of the price, and its 3.5mm output lets it work with third-party kit. Fun AI experience. A real bargain. *HCC #269*

04



Nvidia Shield Android TV

→ £180 ★★★★★

The Android-based streamer/gaming box gets a gentle revamp – same silicon, neater design, new features including future support for Google Assistant. Slick and easy to use. *HCC #272*

05



Amazon Fire TV

→ £80 ★★★★★

Media streamer with impressive search functionality and plenty of content, including 4K Netflix and Amazon Video. HDR support would be nice, though. *HCC #270*

06



Logitech Harmony Elite

→ £270 ★★★★★

Flexible and relatively easy to set up, this all-in-one remote package combines touchscreen handset and hub with smart device app. Worthwhile if you have a stacked kit rack. *HCC #256*

07



Devolo Wi-Fi ac Repeater

→ £50 ★★★★★

Simple plug-based add-on that extends the range of your Wi-Fi network, and offers hardwired access. Could be just the ticket for your loft-based movie room. *HCC #269*

08



Xbox One S

→ From £250 ★★★★★

The retooled Xbox One adds Ultra HD Blu-ray playback, 4K streaming and HDR gaming to the feature list. Available in 500GB/1TB/2TB versions. *HCC #264*

09



PSB Imagine XA

→ £350 ★★★★★

These two-way Dolby Atmos-enabled upfiring speakers are fairly chunky, but work well at creating a height layer and the £350-per-pair ticket makes them an enticing option. *HCC #264*

10



DVDO iScan Mini

→ £275 ★★★★★

HDMI 4K upscaler (using Silicon Image's VRS processing) that teases sharpness from HD and SD sources. A good fit for an entry-level or mid-range 4K TV. *HCC #264*

TOP 5 Blu-ray/DVD boxsets



Planet Earth II [Ultra HD Blu-ray]

Intricately detailed and radiating HDR brilliance, this dazzling 4K outing for the BBC's acclaimed natural history series needs to be seen. And you'll learn a lot about furry critters, too. ★★★★★



Doctor Who: The Power of the Daleks

Unseen since 1966, this missing BBC serial has been recreated using animation – with the choice of colour or black-and-white incarnations – and packs a TARDIS-load of extras. ★★★★★



Phantasm 1-5: Limited Edition

A must-own for fans of the cult film franchise, this epic six-disc boxset delivers impressive HD presentations of all five fright flicks alongside a cornucopia of new and archival bonus goodies. ★★★★★



The 4 Marx Brothers at Paramount (1929-1933)

Five classic comedies from the family troupe get the deluxe treatment – new 1080p transfers from 4K restorations, oodles of bonus goodies – on a pleasing three-disc set. ★★★★★



The Mummy Trilogy [Ultra HD Blu-ray]

Universal digs out its Brendan Fraser fantasy/action series for an HDR do-over (with DTS:X audio). Image quality varies across the three, but is a good improvement on previous BDs. ★★★★★

TOP 10 Soundbars & Soundbases



01 Yamaha YSP-5600SW →£1,900 ★★★★★

With its 46 drivers (including upfiring) this premium 'bar' delivers precisely-steered and immersive audio, even of the Atmos variety. Potent wireless sub and 4K-capable HDMI switching sweeten the high-end deal. HCC #254



02 Canton DM55 →£330 ★★★★★

Canton's smallest soundbase still delivers big sonic thrills. Twin woofers underpin clean and crisp mids and highs, and build quality is first-rate. Doddle to use. Bluetooth built-in. HCC #260



03 Samsung HW-K950

→£1,300 ★★★★★

Soundbar with additional wireless rears and Dolby Atmos support via four upfiring drivers. Impressively largescale performance, good connectivity. No native DTS support.

HCC #263



04 Samsung HW-MS650

→£600 ★★★★★

Superior signal processing and a ground-up design make Samsung's subwoofer-free soundbar thrillingly impressive with movie, TV and music material. Expandable to 5.1.

HCC #273



05 Sony HT-ST5000

→£1,500 ★★★★★

High-end Dolby Atmos-capable soundbar/sub. Upfiring elevate the soundstage (but don't wraparound). Sound quality overall is excellent, blending muscle and depth with musicality. HCC #275



06 Cabasse Stream BAR

→£850 ★★★★★

Soundbar/hi-res speaker that's blessed with real musicality, but doesn't fall short when it comes to energetic film soundtracks. HDMI in/out, but v1.4 only.

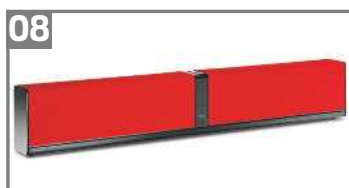
HCC #269



07 Q Acoustics M3

→£300 ★★★★★

A 4in x 6in woofer is tucked away in the M3's eye-catching angular chassis, ensuring this well-priced soundbar has a full-range performance. Simple to use. Bluetooth streaming. HCC #271

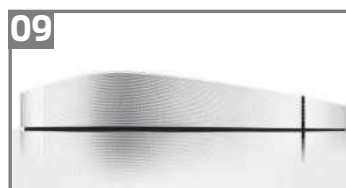


08 DALI Kubik One

→£800 ★★★★★

The Danish speaker brand brings a slice of glamour to your setup with this stylish soundbar. No HDMI or digital decoding but it packs a tight, lively and nuanced sound.

HCC #269



09 Sonos Playbase

→£700 ★★★★★

Although this features the same foibles as the Sonos Playbar (no Bluetooth, no HDMI, no DTS), this multiroom maestro looks good and sounds good. Detailed, with naturalistic bass. HCC #273



10 LG SJ9

→£1,000 ★★★★★

While Dolby Atmos compatible (with dual upfiring drivers), LG's premium bar/sub combi leaves a greater impression with its fulsome delivery and good connectivity.

HCC #274

TOP 5 Back-catalogue Blu-rays



Mulholland Drive

15 years after it first opened at UK cinemas, David Lynch's mindbending neo-noir finally gets the disc release it deserves thanks to the 4K restoration and encoding nous used on StudioCanal's Blu-ray do-over.

★★★★★



Unforgiven [Ultra HD Blu-ray]

Clint Eastwood cemented his reputation as a director with this superior 'revisionist' Western. Now Warner does the movie justice with a filmic, sympathetic 4K HDR encode.

★★★★★



King Kong: Premium Collection

Fans will go ape for this HMV-exclusive platter of the classic monster movie, which lives up to its 'Premium Collection' billing thanks to an attractive encode and engrossing extras.

★★★★★



The Bird With The Crystal Plumage

Dario Argento's genre-defining giallo gets a second Blu-ray release, making amends for a previous aspect ratio error, improving image quality and offering new extras.

★★★★★



The Fisher King

Terry Gilliam's modern fairy tale (starring Jeff Bridges and Robin Williams) arrives on BD via Criterion Collection with a bulging selection of bonus bits and director-approved 2K transfer.

★★★★★

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TOP 5 PVRs



Virgin Media TiVo, £subscription

This triple-tuner PVR offers recording flexibility, useful features – you can undelete deleted shows! – and smart TiVo functionality. If you're in a cable area, consider it

★★★★★



Sky Q, £subscription

Sky's new top-tier product offering dazzles with its image-rich user interface, wireless multiroom skills and recording flexibility delivered by the PVR's 12 tuners. Now supports 4K content

★★★★★



Humax HDR-1100S, £190

Freesat Freetime PVR that impresses with its usability, VOD options and form factor – Humax's small, white box will slot into any kit rack. We tested the 500GB version – 1TB and 2TB models are also available

★★★★★



Humax DTR-T4000, £subscription

This YouView-based PVR is required to get BT Sport's new Ultra HD channel – available to those with BT fast fibre and a BT TV sub. Easy to use and with 1TB of storage

★★★★★



EE TV Smart Box £subscription

This quad-tuner 1TB PVR, from the mobile/broadband corp, offers innovative Replay 24-hour channel recording and great Smart device streaming. Needs more catch-up though

★★★★★

TOP 5 Headphones



Sony MDR-HW700DS, £800

Comfy cans supplied with an HDMI surround processor, enabling multichannel audio to be fed to a virtual 9.1-channel soundstage. The effect is superb – great for late-night listening

★★★★★



Sony MDR-1000X, £360

Superior noise-cancelling cans with hi-res audio support via Sony's LDAC wireless transmission tech. Slick, touch-sensitive operation and healthy battery life. Fulsome sound and comfy to wear

★★★★★



NEW ENTRY

1More MK802, £150

Ignore the bling-tastic blue or red finishes and focus on the assured sound performance from these well-priced closed-back cans. Features include wireless Bluetooth and app control (with burn-in mode). Great value

★★★★★



PSB M4U1, £220

Aimed at both home and on-the-move use (and supplied with a carry case and two cable options), the M4U1s offer solid bass response and impactful highs. Build quality is good, as is comfort

★★★★★



Bose QC35, £290

The latest in the QuietComfort range ditches the wired connection in favour of Bluetooth but retains Bose's luxurious styling and rich performance. Noise-cancelling mode is very efficient

★★★★★

TOP 5 Wireless speakers



KEF Muo, £300

Portable Bluetooth speaker that's a cut above much of the competition. KEF's sonic knowhow results in a punchy, dynamic presentation that cherishes lossless rips. Excellent build quality

★★★★★



Sony SRS-X11, £60

An affordable palm-sized Bluetooth speaker with internal rechargeable battery, Sony's SRS-X11 is supremely portable and sounds decent for the money. A neat little gizmo. Get two and they can work in stereo

★★★★★



Q Acoustics BT3, £280

Bluetooth stereo pair with optical input makes a good alternative to a soundbar (there's even a subwoofer pre-out) while remaining a dab hand at music. Neat and tidy design, good price

★★★★★



Simple Audio Listen, £400

Desktop stereo speakers with Bluetooth support, these benefit from separate tweeter/midbass units and a classy construction. Performance is well-balanced, and a subwoofer output is offered for extra bass

★★★★★



Denon HEOS 5 HS2, £350

The mid-range multiroom speaker gets a second-gen revamp, adding welcome hi-res audio playback and Bluetooth connectivity. Gorgeous looks, boisterous, room-filling sound

★★★★★

HOME CINEMA

Choice

→ IN THE NEXT ISSUE

The perfect organism Exploring the legacy and Blu-ray history of Ridley Scott's *Alien* masterpiece
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CONTENTS SUBJECT TO CHANGE – BUT ONLY FOR THE BETTER



AV Avenger

If you don't ever watch bad movies, you won't know when you're watching a good one. So goes **Steve May's** logic as he makes the case for smallscreen, in-flight entertainment

THE PLANE GAME. It's a great way to unearth movie gems.

I love long-haul flights, not least because I can indulge in a movie or three. But I have strict viewing rules: no bright lights, no feeding after midnight, and no watching any film I have an actual interest in. The idea of peering at a blockbuster on a backseat LED screen should be anathema for any self-respecting AV enthusiast (tell me you used a flight to catch up with *Arrival*, and I'll probably punch you).

Plane viewing also has to involve a genre I'd normally avoid – romcoms, period dramas, teen comedies, anything with Seth Rogen or Amy Schumer... actually, I probably wouldn't watch Rogen even at 40,000 feet.

This means **I see a lot of awful movies when I'm in the air**. But I also occasionally catch treats I'd otherwise miss. *The Duff* and *Bad Moms*, both hugely enjoyable, spring to mind.

The good news is you don't need a boarding pass to play this game at home. Both Netflix and Amazon have scads of lamentable movies to browse. But you need to apply a similar viewing ethic for the experience to work.

Shrink the screen

Having picked a movie I don't actually want to watch, it's important I don't watch it in my home cinema. Second-screen viewing is mandatory – the kitchen or bedroom will do, even a tablet or laptop. I don't need to clear my schedule for the full running time, either. If you assume you'll not want to see your chosen film through to the end, you can pop it on any time, even if you only have a spare ten minutes to kill.

The satisfaction of discovering a film that genuinely entertains, when you have zero expectation, is immense. Given that my preferred

film diet is capes and zombies, then at least the plane game also goes some way to balancing my intake. And it's important to see bad films. They make good films even better.

Of course, if you want to simulate a transatlantic trip in the spare room, headphones are a must. Canned audio is a prerequisite of any in-flight entertainment and a defining aspect of the plane game movie watch. There's an immediacy about headphone listening that's truly unique.

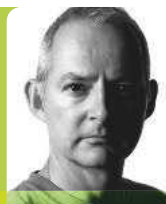
While I'm the first to advocate full-blown surround sound for any occasion, and even get obnoxiously sneery with quite decent soundbars, I'm rather partial to listening to the telly on headphones.

I like the intensity they bring; dialogue seems to become more personal, inflections and nuance easily detectable, and you really get to appreciate Foley detail and subtle scoring. They're also great for sonic isolation – not so much containing TV audio as obscuring intrusive noise from elsewhere in the house. A recent spate of warm weather, which made closing doors an act of self-harm, meant anything I watched was competing with the uncouth antics of *Love Island* and *Big Brother* from another room. Headphones became my first line of defence.

I've also recently discovered the joys of Bluetooth cans. Not for mobile use, but partnering with source gear. Did you know you can pair wireless 'phones with any Amazon Fire TV box? Oh, you did. Anyway, it's a great feature and I'm frustrated that my Sky Q box can't do the same. Of all the unsung tricks buyers should look out for when shortlisting an AV purchase, I reckon Bluetooth headphone support should be near the top of the list. Now if you'll excuse me, I've some garbage to watch ■

*What are the movies you love that you thought you'd hate?
Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com*

Steve May also replicates the plane movie-watching experience at home by eating his dinner off a tiny tray and using his wardrobe as a toilet.





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